

THE ARGOSY.

MARCH, 1897.

AFTER TEN YEARS.

FEBRUARY 10TH, 1887.

I BELIEVE that, setting aside the filial, there is no gratitude more sincere and abiding than that felt towards an author who has benefited you—helped you to new views of life and duty, and in a form that delights and leaves a sense of sweetened recollection.

That, indeed, is the main end and aim of all true fiction.

But, in the pressure of our fevered times, how many write merely to excite and captivate, with resorts to false and factitious sources of interest—passion prostituted, and life made at once venal and venial?

The greater, surely, should be our esteem for a writer who, while holding all the powers of interest and fascination for the great crowd of readers, remains loyal to the honest, natural, beautiful and humane sentiments—who never fails to pay gracious tribute to the ideal of right and wrong, and through the most complicated webs of plot shoots the golden thread of a pure motive and the lesson of the final triumph of that which is good and pure and noble.

"Novelists like Mrs. Henry Wood should never die," said the *Whitehall Review*, just ten years ago. "One of the most prolific, and at the same time most delightful of novelists, has been removed. For Mrs. Henry Wood was an active, zealous, and industrious worker in the field of literature. She was more than that—she was an ornament to it. The pure and wholesome tones and textures of her many books all proclaim that by her death literature has lost a counterfoil to that baser form of modern writing which seeks, not the advancement of noble thought, but the mental gratification of aimless and senseless passions. We do not propose now to analyse the methods which, as a weaver of fiction, Mrs. Henry Wood adopted. We are content to admit their great and lasting success. It is perhaps because, when what we know as sensation creeps into them, the sensation is always of a homely and domestic kind. There is much that is strongly dramatic in what Mrs. Henry Wood has written, but the dramatic incidents and effects, if they surprise and interest, never

terrify. Readers do not rush for a volume by Mrs. Henry Wood if they wish to be terribly frightened. The skilful manipulation of plot may amaze, but it does not quicken morbid desires nor heighten unworthy passion. Novels that do this seldom live. They are written to meet the whims and caprices of a given age, in which, perhaps, a certain taint of indelicacy has got the upper hand in the minds of the more frivolous of men and women. The novels of Mrs. Henry Wood have been suited to the tastes of the past, and they will be found suitable to the cravings of the future. Such novels become our companions. The characters in them become living pictures in that gallery of life in which we walk and muse. These pictures may age and become immortal, but we would fain believe that their creator was immortal as well. But this cannot be, and the best tribute, therefore, we can pay the dead novelist is to remember and revere her in the graceful works she has bequeathed to us and to posterity."

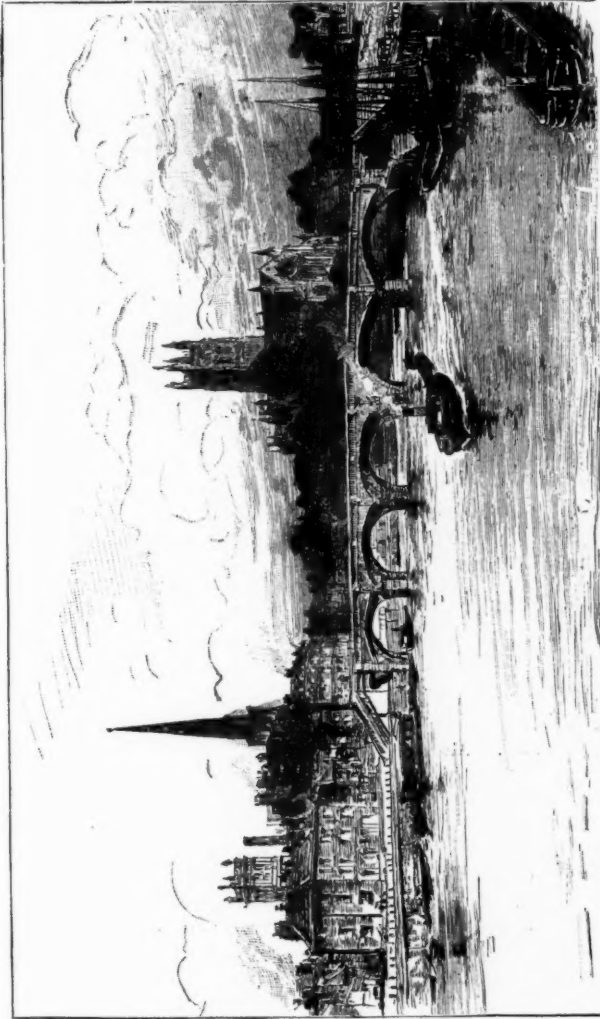
I have quoted somewhat largely from this notice, written ten years ago, because it is so true and so much to the point of what is happening to-day. The writer was no false prophet. The matter-of-fact records of free libraries and other lists prove that Mrs. Henry Wood's stories keep their hold upon the world—that in the midst of new fashions and new tastes (some would perhaps even say new crazes) her books are widely read and sought after. She still heads the lists of popular writers; her books are as much in demand as ever. Nigh half a million copies of "East Lynne" have been sold. Others of her stories have reached—and some, notably "The Channings," "Roland Yorke," and "Mrs. Halliburton's Troubles," have surpassed—the five-figure sale, and even several of the more recent ones grow in public appreciation rather than lose.

You cannot have an effect without a cause. The books are read, they are bought and kept because they meet a want, because they please and educate.

We came upon an anecdote a short time ago that bears upon the point. A friend, a great collector of rare books, and consequently well known to all the Second-hand Booksellers in London, was not long since in one of these shops. "How is it," he asked, "that although I see almost every book on your shelves from time to time, I never come across a copy of 'East Lynne'?" "Why, sir," returned the bookseller, "you need not go far for the reason. The simple fact is, that when people get hold of 'East Lynne,' they stick to it." That ten years after the author's death this should still be true suggests something exceptional, some special and unique power. How many brilliant reputations have been made and lost, how many new writers have risen, have seemed as at one spring to take and to hold the field, and been set aside and forgotten since Mrs. Wood began to write!

It would be a worthy and interesting thing to inquire into the reason for this attachment of the ever-changing reading public,

tempted to ever-changing viands, to an individual author. Suffice it to say that, while Mrs. Henry Wood possessed the rarest gift of invention, of construction, and of plot, she had read largely in life



WORCESTER FROM THE SEVERN.

practically as well as theoretically. Her brain was always at work, her powers of observation were amazing, her deductions were true, to life and invariably correct. Her inventions were wonderful, her

memory unfailing ; she never forgot a trait of character she had observed, or a characteristic action or turn of expression she had witnessed, or an anecdote or story she had heard or read ; and had them so completely at her command that, in the act of writing, all fell into their places as though without effort.

As in all such cases, much was due to education and to temperament.

Her early life, spent under the shadow of Worcester Cathedral, within the sound of Cathedral bells, within sound of the regularly recurrent tramp and scurry of the college schoolboys going to and fro ; all this, and the sweetly-flowing river, and the quaint old houses with their overhanging fronts and gables, passed into her imagination.



SOUTH AISLE.

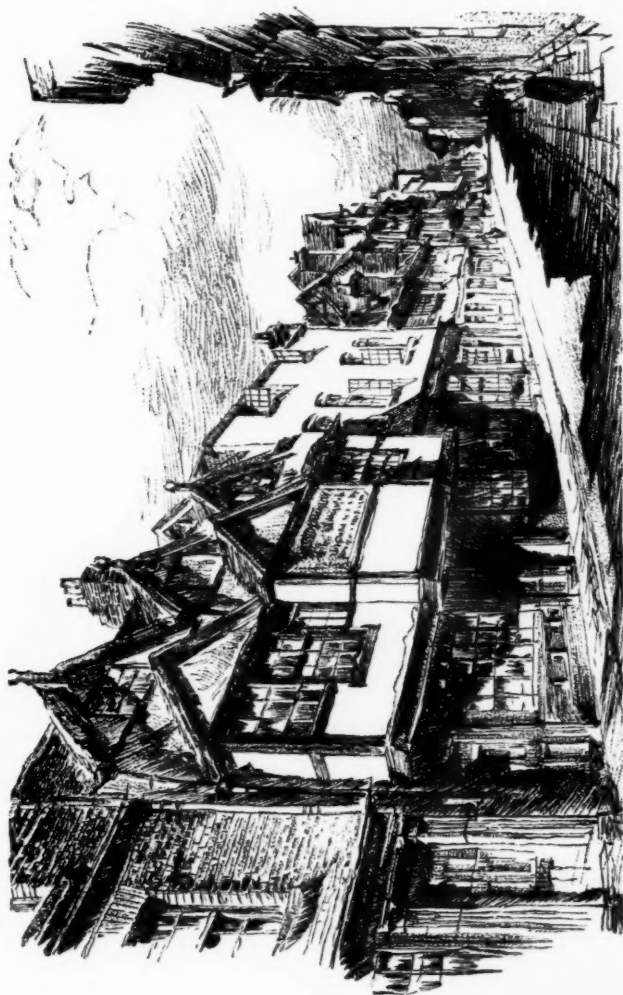
In her most effective stories they are restored, and, if not positively beautified, at least they are painted with the subdued and inevitable halo of what is lovingly remembered. Mrs. Wood never went very far from home for materials. Though she lived much abroad, very seldom are her scenes laid anywhere but in England. Youth, indeed, in her case held the store house of fact and image, from which most she delighted to draw, and now thousands and thousands cherish a series of pictures, beloved by her, of which they never saw the originals, nor will ever see.

In "Mrs. Halliburton's Troubles," which has many half-disguised autobiographical touches, how sweet a panorama of pictures passes before us. You can see them "in the mind's eye, Horatio," as you read.

There is the cathedral, with its soft reflection in the broad-flowing stream, St. Andrew's famous spire rising above it ; Friar Street within a stone's throw—Friar Street, with its peaked windows, overhanging storeys—telling of old times ; Honey Fair, a sweet name that disguises a delightful and interesting quarter—full of lore and suggestiveness.

Johnny Ludlow, too, knew all these corners well, and presents them in his own proper manner. As we wander through the old streets we seem to see his figure at every turn, so completely has the author identified him with the atmosphere of the old cathedral city. There

again, only a turn away, is the *Star and Garter*, where he, with Tod and the good-natured, rather brusque and hasty, but very real old squire, enjoyed so many luncheons and dinners. And what a squire



FRIAR STREET.

have we here portrayed! What a true, downright, honest English gentleman is visibly placed before us, sketched without effort. As the *Times* said years ago when reviewing "East Lynne," "We know no lady author who, by a few strokes of the pen, can so thoroughly

describe an English gentleman." Who, indeed, has given us a succession of truer, more typical, characteristic pictures of English life and character than we have in these stories? The pathos is natural, never forced; the humour is never hackneyed; all the world of that bluff, gruff, kindly old Worcestershire squire is painted for us with the simplest realism, seen through the double medium of the squire's experience and Johnny's inexperience or half-experience. Mrs. Wood's rare knowledge of boy nature, which she learned as she looked out on the college boys tearing through the cloisters or entertaining them at home, comes out here in full flower. There are many pictures of life here as distinctively and characteristically English as anything in the whole realm of English fiction. "These stories," said the *Spectator*, "are perfect of their kind." So, as we wander through the streets of Worcester, Johnny Ludlow is with us at every turn. And not far off, visible from many points as we walk these same streets, are the Malvern Hills, to which Mrs. Wood has conducted some of her characters, and round which she has thrown the gentle sunshine of her own mood to aid the sunshine of nature.

And all the people of those days, deans and canons, with their wives and daughters, schoolmasters and choirmasters, and all the rest—they live again in her pages, absolutely as flesh and blood, the good folks whom in her early days she knew and loved and unconsciously studied.

Mrs. Wood showed there in high degree these two qualities: realistic portraiture of men and women and boys and girls, with invention, plot, and sensational surprises. She successfully used sensational elements for moral ends at a time when the moral aim was much overlooked, and sometimes threatened even to be forgotten altogether. This is one of the great merits of Mrs. Wood's work, and should never be lost sight of: that whilst she strove to interest and amuse, she equally endeavoured to do good, holding up the best side of human nature to admiration, so that one must needs be the better for having read her books.

To create is not to "make up"—to spin curiously and capriciously out of the fancy. It is to portray, to reproduce what has influenced and affected the author, so that by aid of a new medium, strange yet not inconsistent, it shall in the same way, though it may not be in the same measure, influence and affect you. You can only make an impression when the wax is hot. So the impressions made on the easily moved receptive mind of childhood and youth will move you more than almost aught else if they are re-presented in anything like the atmosphere of the original impression.

Mrs. Wood often specially succeeded in this.

Her boys and girls are truly excellent, painted to the life. Her temperament, which was very sympathetic, though still and quiet, was in her favour. She drew, without hurry, her children and youths at full length, clear of feature, with all their traits and foibles. Johnny

Ludlow is indeed a triumph in this light. The young lad is so wonderfully real, with such naïve bits of self-revelation coming in so naturally and spontaneously, that it becomes a virtual inspiration.

Some of the captious critics had said she could not really paint character, could do nothing without the aid of plot and sensation, the real truth being that her character-painting is one of her great and successful points. From first to last they are living people—not puppets—endued with flesh and blood and nerves; we see them all vividly as though they actually existed, and they become our friends. In Johnny she painted character and outwitted these critics once and for ever. The stories are sketches of character—like cameos, much wealth in little room.

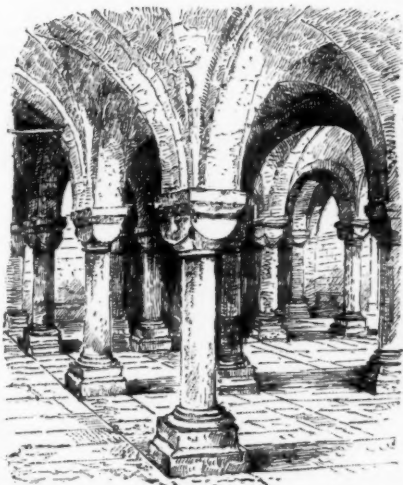
There was nothing but a paean of praise over the first set of these papers. The secret of authorship was well kept; but when the second series was issued it bore the author's name, and then the cue was to say that there was a falling-off, and when the third came, some had it that there was a greater falling-off still.

There was no falling-off. But in the highest critical sense it was inevitable that there should be inequality. And why? Because the further the author went in creating literature under this name, the more improbable it became that a lad like Johnny Ludlow could have seen, known, and experienced all that was attributed to him, not to speak of so setting it down in writing. The dramatic medium was, so to speak, by the very fact of continuous production overcharged.

Yet the stories were all admirable.

Mrs. Wood, in going on writing these papers, undoubtedly did tempt failure, though failure never came; and that she should have gone on through five-and-twenty years regularly at intervals turning out such studies, and yet never losing hold of the characteristic turn of style with which she set out, is a triumph for which we should find it difficult to cite a parallel.

It is a young lad's style from first to last—an English boy's way of



CRYPT, WORCESTER CATHEDRAL.

looking at things, an English boy's way of feeling and of acting, and, what is more, of telling a story.

These five series of the "Johnny Ludlow" papers present a remarkable and varied world, all seen through the medium of a young man's mind and an old man—the excellent squire—reflected through that young mind, and very faithfully reflected too, for he remains a type, and a perfect type, of a vanished world—of an England that has gone from us for ever. The power that could go on weaving story after story of this kind through twenty-five years and maintain exactly the same dramatic touch as at the first is certainly something far out of the common. And in the fifth series (there is a sixth series that has never yet been gathered into a collected form) there are two stories, the one for pathos and the other for humour, certainly as good as anything to be found in the earlier ones.

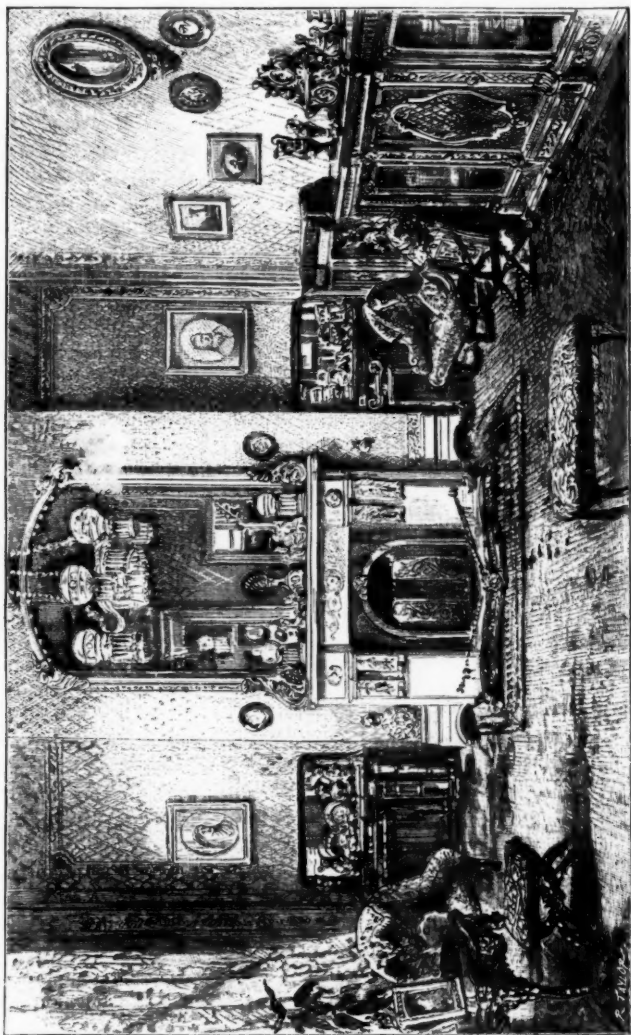
It was my great privilege to know Mrs. Henry Wood, and at one time to see a good deal of her; and in giving a few words of description, I cannot do better than recall what I had to write elsewhere about her some time ago.

When I first went to see her she was in the fulness of her powers, and in spite of great delicacy that had followed her from early days (something affecting the spine, which, as her son has told in her memoir, and not without a touch of humour, a strange and half-ignorant woman did more to relieve than all the doctors consulted) she was a steady worker and very productive.

In my visits to her the first and most lasting impression made on my mind was of a very still, sweet presence, in whose atmosphere no discord could dwell. The delightful repose that seemed constantly to surround her, went in company with a kindly interest in all with whom she came into contact. She looked at once very firm and very amiable—a mixture which in her was tempered by the outflow of ready and unaffected sympathy. Quietude, with an air of great simplicity, and a repose which had in it nothing of self-satisfaction, or indifference to any feeling or emotion in others. She was thus essentially good-mannered—a lady in the truest sense of the word, who had the art—not always a part of so-called good manners—of setting you at once and completely at your ease. I remember, on the first occasion of my dining at her house, a certain tremor in the sense of being for the first time brought into close contact with the great novelist, which was perhaps natural and excusable in me; but it vanished the moment I had exchanged a few words with her and had answered some unexpected kindly questions about my children, and their characters and ways; about their education, and so on; and in fact before I had been beside her half an hour, the great novelist was forgotten, and only the gracious and sympathetic woman was before me.

Another thing that much impressed me at an early stage of my

acquaintance with her was a very uncommon mixture of tact—that seemed natural to her—and ready, quick interest. She was not only



PART OF DRAWING-ROOM.

keen to hear all about what her sons were interested in and concerned with, but also about their friends and their concerns. In a gentle way she drew every one out, without obtruding herself at all.

It interested me to observe how she would listen to the most ordinary remarks of the young folks, and often give such a turn to them as to impart, and with no affectation of teaching either, a superior interest, sometimes simply marked by quietly telling of someone else who had said so and so, or of someone she had known, who in similar circumstances had acted in such and such a way; and these little remarks and reminiscences and anecdotes delicately and nicely put, with the point she wished to impress always apparent, yet not too strongly emphasised.

There was no fussiness, nothing of the busybody, but a healthy, natural, graceful, easy expression of interest that was prevailing, though in no way boldly asserted. Her whole appearance and expression betokened gentleness; but gentleness with possibilities of great firmness of will behind it, where it was needful to exercise it—like Wordsworth's Margaret—"a woman of a steady mind." She was slight of stature, with a singularly beautiful and refined face and a very graceful carriage of the head, and the kind of figure that looks taller than it really is from moving lightly, and with an airy ease: intellectual without affectation, and refined while still in the best sense domesticated and approachable.

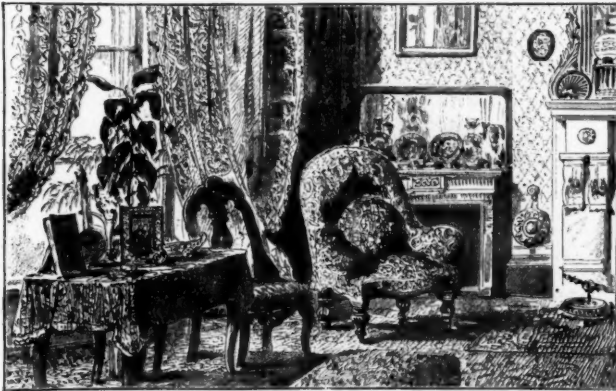
She was not much inclined to discuss her own novels; but I remember well on one occasion when I was at her house, and Miss Hesba Stretton and Miss Anne Beale were there, her readiness to speak of the points in their works which had been interesting to her and which she had derived pleasure from. She was with regard to the works of others, at once keen and generous in judgment.

One of the things about which I had to talk to her was the touching story of "Bessy Wells," a story of low life in London, which appeared in the pages of the 'Sunday Magazine.' I had already seen a good bit in the way of visiting low quarters in London, alike in the purlieus of Drury Lane, Old Kent Road, Deptford, Ratchiffe Highway, and other parts, and her interest in the little details which I could communicate to her was very great indeed.

It is astonishing how keen her curiosities were in these matters; how absolutely by force of imagination and sympathy she had realised the whole condition and scope of that life—as for one thing exhibited in 'A Life's Secret' and the folk so strangely mixed of Daffodil's Delight—so that few suggestions needed to be given her in regard to "Bessy Wells" compared with what it has been my lot to have to tender to writers of fiction alike as regards the circumstances of the poor, prisons, reformatories, etc. Her realising power is scarcely anywhere more marked than in this little story, which in this respect has a value of its own, though it does not of course aim at the kind of interest which obtained in her novels proper. But it shows her especially as the interested inquirer into social conditions, and into the means by which the sufferings of the poor and fallen might be lessened or removed.

Though with none of the affectations of the "society woman," her powers of conversation were marked. She was a very racy and earnest talker, and apt at finding the available meeting-point in another, due in degree to her quick sympathy, in degree to her insight and natural tact.

And it may be added that although she was averse to discussing her own books, she would very readily discuss the knotty points in a plot, or listen to a difficulty that had arisen in a complicated love-case, or the solution that had been brought to some exciting mystery of real life. Her quiet and unobtrusive largeness of interest was one of the most noticeable things about her. It was seen in her ways with her children; in her happy art of finding unmistakably the interests of others and in answering to them; and to this perhaps was due in great degree her splendid memory, from which anything that

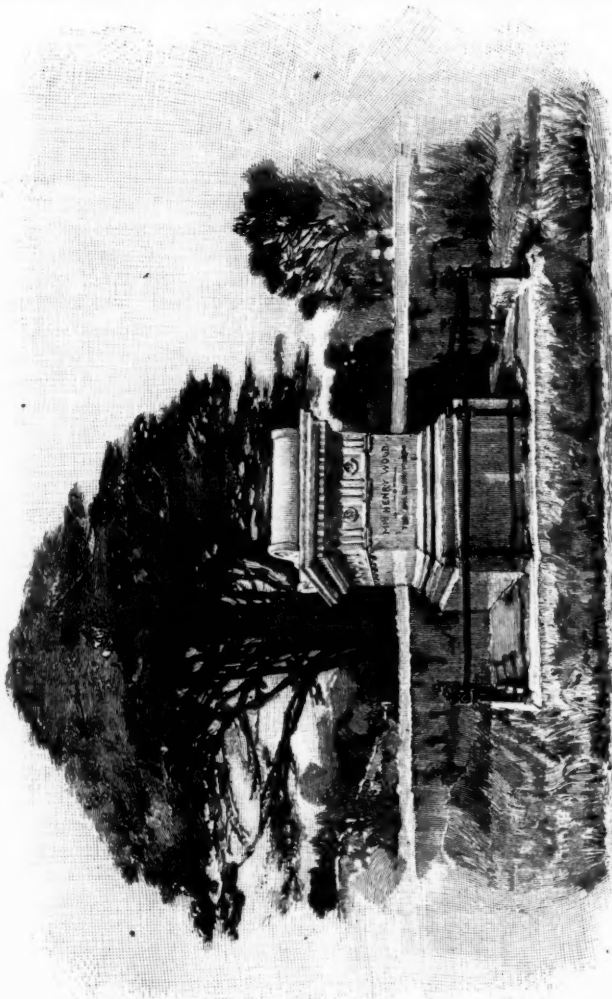


had touched or deeply impressed her was really never effaced. The secret, too, perhaps of her success in pictures of boy character.

Whatever subject came on the *tapis*, she was apt to throw new light upon it. How gently came her suggestive words, how sufficing the reasons with which on occasion she could back up the position she took! And she had a great art in stating a case. Even if this was no more than the impression that certain words or acts must leave on the mind of another person, she had the gift of making it clear, and by this gift was able to serve others very materially.

I can clearly see her once more as I write, her fine, expressive countenance lit up as she bends forward a little in her chair—alas, for ten years now the vacant chair—gently to suggest some new view or point that had been left out of count, as with her right hand she throws back her capstrings, and then quietly extends her hand towards you; and the smile that accompanies this action is the finest commentary on the words and on her kindly intents.

In these visits an abiding impression was made upon me of gentleness, resolution, grace, elevation of character, large sympathy and disinterestedness, which I carried away with me, and the recollection



MRS. HENRY WOOD'S TOMB.
(A Copy of the Tomb of Saïto Africanus.)

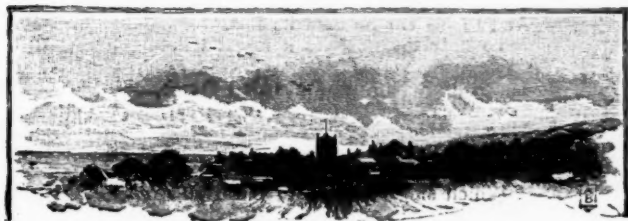
of which I cherish. It is quite true that such people as Mrs. Henry Wood do not die when they leave the world. Their influence and strong personality live after them. To the few of her house-

hold who survive (there are but two) I have reason to know she is still as present as when she walked with them; her unconscious influence is as strong, the tones of her sweet, clear voice still ring in their ears; silent, unseen, she is still a companion. I can well believe and understand this. Even strangers, who once caught the soft yet brilliant flash of her eye, watched the change of the exquisite complexion, listened to the animated but sympathetic tones, left her with an impression that never faded. Pleasant were those hours that I spent in Mrs. Henry Wood's home, for one could not but feel one had gained much, though the affectation of teaching or consciously conferring benefit was far from her. What most struck me was the sweet subdued geniality that diffused itself everywhere, and the sense of strong character unasserted but still operative there. How much more was this felt and understood by those who were privileged to live with her in daily communion and companionship year after year.

But these separations are inevitable. All who knew Mrs. Henry Wood could never realise that death could come to that sweet and quiet presence so full of brilliant vitality; yet for her too the hour sounded; the chair became vacant; for the last time the doors were opened for the sad and melancholy procession to pass out. How well I remember standing by the grave on the heights of Highgate Cemetery, as they lowered the coffin into it on that clear but cold 16th day of February, 1887. And thinking of these things, I felt how much that was rare and precious had vanished from the world, of which the world that knew and valued her books yet knew little or nothing.

It is for this reason that I have thought well, after ten years, to draw attention to the fact of Mrs. Henry Wood's continued and ever-increasing popularity. And this is likely to continue, for her works appeal to all classes, as human nature truly painted ever does. Educated England will become more of a reading England: and in a few years to come we shall find books appreciated and treasured in the hands of those who a few years ago could scarcely read at all. The good and the true in literature will survive, and it will be well that the wholesome influence of the novels of Mrs. Henry Wood should be amongst the abiding for all time.

ALEXANDER H. JAPP, LL.D.





INTERPRETATION.

DOWN from the red-tiled fishing town,
 Whilst sunset's fires flushed sea and land,
'Mid stranded boats and cordage brown,
 The children played upon the sand.
But one sweet, rosy boy of three,
 Of eager, azure, questioning eyes,
Looked out upon the boundless sea
 That glowed beneath the crimson skies.

And as with wondering gaze he stood
 Beside that endless mystic scroll,
The Norseman woke within his blood,
 The Saga surged throughout his soul.
He saw upon the ocean's rim
 Great galleons rise with prows of gold,
Whilst o'er the waves a battle-hymn
 In swelling full-voiced chorus rolled.

Lo! here were given heaven's visions grand
 To three-years' child of seeing eyes ;
He left his playmates on the sand,
 And went to find his Paradise.
'Mid dreams of white-sailed, golden ships
 He came upon a smooth-lipped shell,
And to his ear he held its lips,
 To hear the wonders it might tell.

Down on a bank of pinks and thyme,
 The sea-born harp close to his ear,
He sat. Nor silvery vesper-chime,
 Nor children's laughter did he hear,
But only that sweet mystic lyre
 Which sings of tears to those who weep
By wreck-strewn shore or cottage fire—
 At last he gently fell asleep.

And as he slept, the lips of pearl
Sang witching songs into his ear,
Safe-curtained by a golden curl,
That earth the music might not hear—
He wandered in his heaven-sent dreams
Through woods and fairy-haunted vales,
Where naiads bathed in crystal streams,
And groves rang sweet with nightingales.

And grottoes, lapped by gurgling waves,
All glistening from a moonlit sea,
And echoing, gem-bespangled caves,
Filled with rich dreamy minstrelsy,
And palaces of gleaming gold,
In visions fair the boy beguiled
Through tales the pearly charmer told—
What wonder that the dreamer smiled?

There came an aged man along,
And as he saw the sleeping boy,
He wondered what inspired the song
That lit his face with such strange joy.
From out the little yielding hand
He gently took the shining shell;
Perchance his ear might understand
The secret of its magic spell.

No spangled caves or golden strands
Were in the songs it sang to him;
Its music was of beckoning hands,
And far-off faces, sad and dim.
No hymns of hope his ear beguiled;
Old voices came on every strain—
In tears he kissed the sleeping child,
And sighed, "Oh, for my youth again!"

ALEXANDER LAMONT.





PEACE WITH HONOUR.

BY SYDNEY C. GRIER, AUTHOR OF "IN FURTHEST IND," ETC.

CHAPTER V.

ACROSS THE FRONTIER.

"WHEN we come to the crest of this rise we shall be able to see Fort Rahmat-Ullah in the distance," said Stratford to Georgia. He had quitted his place in the long line of travellers who were making their way across the broken ground, alternately sandy and rocky, which characterises the districts lying near the frontier of Khemistan, and joined the two doctors, who were riding somewhat in advance of the caravan in order to escape the dust. Dr. Headlam turned back to the side of Lady Haigh, with whom Stratford had been riding, and Georgia looked round at her new cavalier with shining eyes.

"It was Fort Rahmat-Ullah that Major North relieved, wasn't it?" she asked, although she knew perfectly well what the answer would be.

"Yes, during that little war last year. It is our farthest outpost on this frontier and, when the tribes were up, they naturally set their hearts on getting hold of it. Of course the garrison has been strengthened since then, and the *pax Britannica* is quite effective in the neighbourhood. We are to spend a few days at the fort, you know, before we bid farewell to civilisation, and make our dash into the desert, so that it is a comfort to feel that we need not expect to find ourselves besieged there. It's rather a pity that North will be away."

"Away?" asked Georgia in astonishment.

"Yes, didn't you hear that he had got leave from the Chief to go and see a friend away at Alibad, to the west of us? They used to work together in the old days, but North had the chance of distinction

and got his V.C. and his promotion, and the other man didn't. I rather like to see North going off in this way to look him up—shows he doesn't forget old friends, and that sort of thing, and perhaps he is just as glad not to be lionised at the fort. It's a little hard on us, though."

"Yes, it is a little suggestive of *Hamlet* with Hamlet left out," observed Georgia meditatively, determined that Mr. Stratford should not perceive the unreasoning disappointment with which the news had infected her.

"And yet I don't quite see what he could do for us if he was there, beyond giving us the gratification of beholding him on his native heath, so to speak," pursued Stratford.

"Oh, well," said Georgia carelessly, "I was counting on his being able to ride out with us along the way he went, and show us just where his different adventures happened. It would make it seem so much more real, you know." She was speaking easily and naturally, bent on accounting to herself as well as to Mr. Stratford for that absurd sense of disappointment, which was so keen that she felt it must before this have betrayed itself in face or voice. But were Dick's adventures not real to her? Had she not scanned the papers day by day at the time of the siege as eagerly as Mabel herself? And when at last the full account reached England of the relief of the fort, and of the heroism of the man through whose enterprise it had been accomplished, had she not bowed her head upon the page of the "Thunderer" and cried heartily, out of pure joy in the remembrance that this man had once loved her? Decidedly there was no need that the events attending the relief of Fort Rahmat-Ullah should be rendered more vivid for Georgia; but Stratford seemed struck by her remark.

"That is quite true, Miss Keeling. North is treating us all very shabbily. I hope you will put it to him at lunch. He leaves us after the midday halt, you know."

But Miss Keeling did not choose to do anything of the kind, and when Sir Dugald appealed to her to join in condemning North's desertion, she smiled pleasantly as she answered that no doubt Major North feared lest the attraction of his presence at Fort Rahmat-Ullah should distract the attention of the visitors from the less interesting duties which ought to engross them. The remark was intended to make Dick uncomfortable, and when Georgia saw that he was raging inwardly over the construction she had put upon his motives, absurd though it was, she felt happier, as having in some degree repaid him for the disappointment he had inflicted upon her, although, when he had ridden away, still fuming, she was filled with compunction, and spent some time in solitude and self-reproach, which meant bemoaning her own touchiness and calling herself names.

Her sorrow was not allowed to sleep, for at Fort Rahmat-Ullah everything around kept her in mind of Dick. The scenes connected with his great exploit were held in reverence by all, and from the

officers of the detachment quartered in the fort nothing was heard but lamentations over his absence. On the very first evening the new-comers were swept away by the general wave of enthusiasm, and allowed themselves to be personally conducted round the walls, in order to have the different localities rendered famous by the siege pointed out to them. But this was merely an informal inspection, for the next morning an old European sergeant, who had taken part in the Relief of Lucknow, and was now employed as some kind of clerk in the fort, appeared and expressed his readiness to act as cicerone during a second tour of the place.

"Evidently," said Stratford, "the thing to do here is to make the circuit of the walls once a day, each time with a different guide."

"We shall get together a good collection of the different legends which are beginning to crystallise round North's exploit," said Dr. Headlam, who was a student of folk-lore. "I suppose we must go, or we shall hurt this old chap's feelings. He regards North as something like a demigod."

"I think once round the walls is enough for me," said Sir Dugald, "so I must hope that the tutelary deity of the place will not be very furious at my neglect when we meet him again. What do the ladies intend to do?"

"Oh, we are going, of course," said Lady Haigh promptly, unfurling a huge white umbrella. "I always make a point of seeing and hearing everything I can about everybody."

Sir Dugald sighed almost imperceptibly, and buried himself once more in his Ethiopian grammar, while the rest started out under the guidance of the old soldier. Constant practice on every new-comer who came in his way had made the Sergeant perfect in the tale he had to tell. He knew exactly the points at which his hearers would be thrilled with horror or touched with sympathy, and he enjoyed keeping them on the rack of suspense when he reached a crisis in his story. He had been in the fort himself at the time of the siege, and Georgia held her breath as he described the wearing terror of the night-attacks, and the uneasiness of the long days, troubled by fears of the enemy without and of famine within the walls. Then she saw, as clearly as if she had been present, the little group of officers gathered in a shadowy corner of the ramparts one morning before night had given place to day. Dick was among them, disguised as one of the fair-skinned hill-men often met with along the Khemistan frontier, and he was going out alone, taking his life in his hand, in the forlorn hope of getting through the enemy and bringing help to the fort. So slight was the prospect of success that none but those on the ramparts when he started knew of his expedition, and the women in the place, who were not told about it for fear of raising baseless hopes only to be dashed again, thought that he had been killed in a night sortie and his body not recovered. One by one his fellows gripped his hand and bade God keep him in his enterprise;

then he was swiftly let down to the ground outside by means of a rope suspended in the shadow of the turret, and before the rope could be drawn up his form had melted into the shadows around.

Almost immediately on his setting out he was met by the gravest, perhaps, of the perils he was to encounter. Descending a rugged hill into a dry watercourse, which he hoped would afford him some cover, the loose stones rolling under his feet betrayed him to the drowsy watchman of a party of the enemy, who were sleeping, wrapped in their mantles, round a smouldering fire. They were between him and the fort, and there was no hope of retreat; but as the sentry's bullet came skipping over the rocks past him, and the sleepers, on the alert at once, sat up and grasped their weapons, Dick's resolution was taken. With a cry of joy he rushed towards the fire and inquired eagerly and incoherently in Khemistani whether the fort had fallen and he was too late to take his part in the plundering. The party upon whom he had chanced were all good Moslems, and their rage was extreme on discovering by his dress that the intruder was a hill-man, and that they had been awakened because a wretch of an idolater was trying to get a share of their booty. He was driven from their camp with blows and curses, and ordered to tell his people that any further attempt to participate in the expected spoils would be met by force of arms. The same idea helped him again and again during the day. On sighting a party of the enemy, he had only to approach them humbly and detail what had happened to him, asking for redress, when the same fate would befall him immediately on his mentioning what his crime had been. Every chase took him farther from the fort and nearer to civilisation, and at last he fell in with a small party of hill-men, fleeing from the hated Moslems into territory which was still British, who allowed him to join himself to them.

But this meeting landed him in another danger, for although he could speak the hill dialect well enough to pass muster with the lowlanders, he could not deceive those whose native tongue it was. For some time he parried questions by declaring that he belonged to a different tribe; but the hill-men grew more and more suspicious, thinking that he must be a spy belonging to the camp of their hereditary foes. They kept a close watch on him, and he gathered that they intended to deliver him up to the first British patrol they came across. This would have suited his purpose excellently but for the extremely slow rate at which his new friends travelled, and he seized the first opportunity that offered itself of eluding their vigilance and striking off across country to the nearest fort. His late entertainers pursued him; but he reached the fort first and explained his mission, so that when the hill-men arrived they were electrified to behold him in uniform assisting in the preparations for the relief expedition. Thence his course had been, as Fitz Anstruther remarked

irreverently, "a triumphal procession," an observation which the old soldier who was acting as guide took in very good part.

"Ay," he said, "and we are all proud of him here. We don't have many ladies come to the fort, especially since the rising; but to hear some of them talk that have been here this last year, you'd think the whole place wasn't nothing but a memorial of him, though there! we're just about as bad ourselves. When a new subaltern joins—though it ain't often we get them raw enough—the officers take him round and show him everything. When they get to the north face they tell him, 'This here was named after Major North. He started on his journey down the slope.' There wasn't more than one of them took it right in; but the rest are always puzzled, and don't like to contradict. By the time they've got it worked out in their minds they're as proud of the Major as any of us, and had rather follow North of the Khemistan Horse than the Commander-in-Chief. Ah! he's a brave chap and a cool one, and we were downright mad when we knew we were not to have him back here; but he'll want all his bravery and all his presence of mind where you're going."

"Come, Sergeant, you mustn't frighten the ladies," said Stratford.

"Frighten the ladies!" repeated the old man scornfully. "I could a deal sooner frighten any of you gentlemen, and no offence to you, sir, neither. I've seen a good many ladies in my time, and I can tell that these two is just as full of spirit as an egg is full of meat. Looking out for adventures, ma'am, ain't you?" to Georgia. "I thought so; and her ladyship there, she's been through so much that she ain't afraid of nothing."

"This is reassuring," said Lady Haigh. "I hope you young men are now convinced what desirable travelling companions we are?"

"I don't so much know about that," said the old Sergeant reflectively. "I suppose as you'll bundle yourselves up in veils, like the women of the country, when you get to Ethiopia, my lady?"

"Yes, we must," returned Lady Haigh.

"That's all right, then, and I'll make bold to give the young lady a bit of advice. Don't you go playing no tricks with your veil, ma'am; you keep it down when there's any Ethiopians about. I could tell you of times when a whole caravan has been cut up for the sake of one woman, and she made a slave of."

"Miss Keeling, you must swallow the warning for the sake of the compliment contained in it," said Dr. Headlam, while Fitz glared speechlessly at the Sergeant, who went on in a meditative voice:

"No, it don't so much signify what the woman is like, so long as she's different to theirs. Not but what I dare be bound as they'd find they'd caught a Tartar in this young lady. She would be queen instead of slave before they'd done with her."

"This is really too flattering!" said Georgia, her face flushing. "Have you anything more to show us, Sergeant?"

"I'm afraid as that's all, ma'am. But don't you go for to be

offended at my plain speaking. I could tell you was a lady of spirit by your going to Kubbet-ul-Haj at all. And, bless you, you can do near everything with these fellows if you talk big a little, and don't let 'em see as you are shaking in your shoes all the time."

The old man's face as he enunciated this doctrine was so comical that Georgia accepted the implied apology, and the affair ended in a laugh.

"It never struck me that we were to wear veils as a protection," said Georgia to Lady Haigh as they returned to their quarters. "I thought it was only for fear of outraging the people's feelings."

"If it had been only that," returned Lady Haigh, "I should certainly have refused on principle to wear a veil. You know that I have knocked about a good deal, my dear. When Sir Dugald asked me to marry him he said he felt quite guilty in trying to allure me away from all my friends and my work, and I seized the opportunity. I said I shouldn't mind leaving everything in the very least if he would only promise to take me with him wherever he went. He did promise, and I have gone everywhere with him—to some very strange places indeed. I have often been where no English lady had ever been seen before; but I have always refused to cover my face. They used to tell me that the people were not accustomed to see a woman unveiled. 'Well, then, they must become accustomed to it,' I always said. Then they suggested that it might outrage their religious sentiments; but, as I pointed out, people must learn not to let their feelings be hurt so easily. But this time it was different. When it came to be a case of endangering the safety of the whole Mission, Sir Dugald told me that the choice lay between his breaking his promise and leaving me behind and my wearing a veil. I did not see it at all, because the Kubbet-ul-Haj people ought to accustom themselves to seeing new things, and I really yielded solely on account of you. Dugald"—they had reached their own verandah by this time—"didn't I tell you that I only consented to wear a veil for Miss Keeling's sake?"

"I believe you have mentioned the fact more than once, now that I come to think of it," returned Sir Dugald, looking up from his book.

"But, really, Lady Haigh, I am not afraid," said Georgia. "If you think that the old man was only talking nonsense, I will join you in organising a protest against Ethiopian customs with the greatest pleasure, for I should much prefer not wearing a veil."

"Oh, but it really is necessary for you, my dear. It is different in my case; I am old, and I never was anything much to look at, and I am indubitably married. But suppose the King should see you, and take into his head to want to make you his fifteenth wife——"

"As a Mohammedan he is not allowed more than four," interposed Sir Dugald mildly.

"Oh, I am sure he doesn't count the ones he has killed or divorced!" said Lady Haigh. "Well, in any case, Georgie, it would be very awkward. You might refuse to marry him, but he wouldn't take a refusal. He would simply request Sir Dugald to settle the matter. If he was told that it was the custom in England to allow ladies their choice, he would say that at Kubbet-ul-Haj you must do as the Kubbet-ul-Hajis did. Then, if you still refused, he might do as the old man suggested, and murder us all to get hold of you. So you see that it is really necessary for you to cover your face, and I do it to keep you company."

"But with the veil, you will, of course, adopt the other dictates of Eastern etiquette," said Sir Dugald, "which forbid a lady to speak to any man not of her immediate family?"

"That would be dreadfully dull for me," said Lady Haigh. "What should I do when you were busy?"

"Far worse for me," cried Georgia. "I protest against such treatment, Sir Dugald! Do you mean to condemn me to perpetual silence? I have no relation of any kind here."

"Ah, Eastern society makes no provision for the New Woman," observed Sir Dugald.

Georgia groaned.

"I am so dreadfully tired of that name," she said. "But I believe, Sir Dugald, that Eastern etiquette would oblige Lady Haigh and me to ride humbly behind with the servants while you gentlemen were cantering gaily in front—wouldn't it? Is that to be the order of our going?"

"No, I think we must make up our minds to disregard Ethiopian opinion in that respect," said Sir Dugald. "Don't be afraid, Miss Keeling, you shall lay aside your veils in the tents and when we get to our own quarters at Kubbet-ul-Haj. It is only in the streets and on the march that you need wear them."

"And really they are not so very bad," said Lady Haigh, shaking out a heap of white drapery. "When I knew we must make up our minds to such garments I determined that they should be as little trouble as possible, so I got these *burkas* made. I remembered seeing the women wearing them in the Panjab long ago. You see, the *burka* is simply put on over everything, and covers you from head to foot without an opening—merely that embroidered lattice-work for the eyes. It gives you no trouble, whereas the *isar*, which the Baghdadi women wear, and which poor Cecil Egerton had to adopt when she was governess at the Palace, is nothing but a sheet pure and simple. You have to hold it together in front with one hand and over your face with the other. No matter how bad the weather may be, you can never spare a hand to hold up your dress, or your sheet drops; you must just trail through the mud. I could not stand that."

Georgia acknowledged thankfully the wisdom of Lady Haigh's

remarks, and when the day arrived on which the actual journey to Kubbet-ul-Haj was to begin, she put on the *burka* without a murmur. The start was an imposing sight, for most of the officers in the fort accompanied the Mission as far as the Ethiopian frontier, and the rest of the garrison lined the walls and sped the parting guests with a rousing cheer. The servants and baggage had started earlier in the day, and when they had been caught up a halt was made for lunch, after which the travellers delivered themselves into the hands of the body of Ethiopian troops who had been sent to meet them on the frontier and escort them to the capital, and the British officers returned to Fort Rahmat-Ullah. Dick North came riding up just in time to fall into his place in the cavalcade, and the long array of riders and baggage-animals took their way across the frontier.

The cavalry escort, of which one portion headed the procession, while the remainder brought up the rear, was not calculated, so far as its outward aspect was concerned, to allay any apprehensions that might have been fluttering the breasts of the timid. Its members were wild, reckless-looking fellows, evidently ready to go anywhere and do anything, but apparently quite as well qualified to rob their convoy as to protect it. Uniformity of dress or accoutrements among them there was none, but they resembled one another in that they were all fierce of face, all unbridled of speech, all dirty, and all armed to the teeth with a wonderfully miscellaneous collection of weapons. It seemed almost madness to take ladies into the heart of a country which, until very lately, had been actively hostile, under the guardianship of such men as these, and the younger members of the Mission felt their hearts sink suddenly with an unwonted feeling of apprehension as they took their last look at the fort, that isolated outpost of Britain and civilisation on the borders of barbarism. But Sir Dugald's impassive face betrayed no emotion whatever as he halted beside the track to allow the caravan to file past him, and the younger men took comfort as they remembered that their leader was one who, although he had never hitherto had the opportunity of distinguishing himself in a wide field, was reputed never to have made a mistake in the many minor but still important duties with which he had been entrusted.

Nor had Sir Dugald himself started for Kubbet-ul-Haj with a heart so light as to induce him to neglect any precaution that lay in his power. When it had once been ascertained that the passage of an escort of British, or even of Indian, troops through Ethiopian territory was out of the question, Sir Dugald agreed at once to entrust the safety of the Mission to the King's own soldiers. But he bestowed special care on the selection of the servants who were to accompany the expedition, down to the very camel-men, choosing, so far as was possible, old soldiers, and these from the frontier, where there was always a hearty feeling of dislike simmering against the Ethiopians. These men might be relied upon to hold together in the strange

country, and to show a bold front in case of necessity, and they also despised the Ethiopians far too much to associate with them, which lessened the likelihood both of quarrels and plots. With the exception of the wives of a few of these men, there were only two women among the servants, Lady Haigh's elderly Syrian attendant Marta, and Georgia's maid. This was a Khemistani girl named Rahah, a waif from the frontier who had found her way in some mysterious manner to Bab-us-Sahel, and after being handed over to the missionary ladies to be looked after, had been trained by Miss Guest—who suffered much in the process—as a lady's-maid. Her name was supposed by the learned to mean "rest," but her character did not accord with it, for there was no rest for any human being that had anything to do with Rahah. Her chief recommendations for the post she now held were her undeniable cleverness with her fingers and some knowledge of the Ethiopian language, which might prove useful to her mistress in communicating with female patients, while she had already learnt, during the past few weeks, to render considerable assistance to Georgia as anæsthetist and dresser.

The caravan which was composed of such incongruous elements found its journey more peaceful than might have been anticipated. The members of the escort, although somewhat addicted to the snapping up of unconsidered trifles, were capable of frightening away any other robbers, and on the march were content to keep at a respectful distance from their charges. In this foreign country there could be none of those digressions from the track which had proved so pleasant in Khemistan, but the members of the Mission were not altogether without subjects of interest to occupy them. Georgia and Dr. Headlam were making a collection of all the birds, plants and insects they met with, for in this respect Ethiopia was new ground. Sir Dugald was ruthless in his refusal to allow more than one collection to be carried with the expedition, and the rival collectors were thus deprived of the stimulus of competition. The only thing to do was to allow the first finder of a new species to monopolise the glory of its possession until a finer specimen was discovered, and in this finding Dr. Headlam complained that Georgia had an unfair advantage, since Fitz was always at her service and eager to help her. But in spite of little squabbles of this kind everything went pleasantly, chiefly owing, Fitz said, to the fact that North was generally so busily occupied with his duties of noting the configuration of the country and the windings of the track, with a view to map-making, that he had no time to ride with the others and enter into conversation. Since his return to the rest of the party he had scarcely spoken to Georgia, and she told herself that it was better so.

This was the state of affairs when the march came to an end, and the Mission, amid the thunder of very rickety cannon, the shouting of the populace, and the shrill welcoming cries of the women, entered the city of Kubbet-ul-Haj.

CHAPTER VI.

AN OFFER OF CO-OPERATION.

"THE King of all Kings, the Upholder of the Universe, places this hovel at the disposal of his high eminence the Queen of England's Envoy, and entreats that he will deign to use it as his own," said the sleek official who had been deputed to meet the travellers and bring them into the town, as he paused opposite the doorway of a large house and indicated with extended hand that the end of the journey had been reached.

"In other words, this imposing building is to be our residence for the present," said Sir Dugald, riding into the courtyard and turning round. "Allow me to welcome you to Kubbet-ul-Haj, ladies."

"It is not as good as Baghdad," said Lady Haigh, looking round disparagingly on the whitewashed walls; "but I dare say we shall be very comfortable. After all, it won't be for long."

"Express my thanks to the King," said Sir Dugald pointedly to the messenger. "And tell him that the pleasantness of our quarters will make us anxious to prolong our stay in his city."

The official, well-pleased, stayed only to point out the entrance to the second courtyard of which the house boasted, and to intimate that if the accommodation provided should prove to be too limited, another house could easily be secured, and then took his departure, while the new arrivals passed under an archway into the inner court, to find facing them the chief rooms of the establishment. These were evidently intended as Sir Dugald's quarters, and Lady Haigh surveyed them with high approval.

"Come!" she said. "We shall not be so badly off after all. I was beginning to be afraid we should be as much crowded as you were at Agra in the Mutiny, Dugald. I think the rooms on that side will do nicely for you, Georgie."

"I don't know whether you will all be able to find quarters in the first block of buildings, gentlemen," said Sir Dugald to his staff when he had helped his wife and Georgia to dismount, and they had gone indoors to explore. "I must have Mr. Kustendjian there, for he may be wanted at any moment, and I doubt whether that will leave you rooms enough."

"If anyone has to seek quarters outside, I hope I may be the favoured man," said Dr. Headlam. "Judging by the sights I saw as we came through the streets, and the cries for medicine which were addressed to me, there is a great lack of doctors here, and I shall have my hands pretty full if I begin to try any outside practice. I think I am justified in believing that you would approve of such a course, Sir Dugald? It could only make the Mission more popular."

"By all means, if you wish it ; but don't wear yourself out with doctoring all Kubbet-ul-Haj, and forget that you came here as surgeon to the Mission. You think you will do better if you are lodged outside?"

"Well, I didn't quite like the idea of bringing all the filth and disease of Kubbet-ul-Haj into the Mission headquarters, but that would remove the objection. I think it would be both safer and more agreeable for all of us if you would allow me to camp in some other house."

"Then perhaps you could take that collection of yours over to your new quarters as well as your other belongings? It is not altogether the most delightful of objects."

"Either as to sight or smell," put in Dick North. "Those beasts you have preserved in spirits are enough to give a man the horrors, doctor."

"Oh, our much-maligned masterpieces shall share my quarters, by all means," said the doctor. "If Miss Keeling breaks her heart over parting with the collection, don't blame me."

"Miss Keeling will probably bear the loss with equanimity," said Sir Dugald. "Natural history collections are not exactly ladies' toys. At any rate, if she is uneasy about the state of her pet specimens you can bring her bulletins respecting them at meal-times. We shall see you as usual at tiffin and at dinner, I suppose, doctor? And you know that Lady Haigh is always glad to welcome you at tea."

"I shall certainly not decline such an invitation in favour of solitary meals hastily partaken of amongst the specimens," said Dr. Headlam.

"Then we may consider that settled," said Sir Dugald. "I think we may regard ourselves as fairly fortunate in our quarters here. What is your opinion, Stratford?"

"I think the place is very well adapted for our business, certainly," returned Stratford. "The general public will only be admitted to the outer court, I suppose?"

"Yes; the large room on the ground floor of your quarters will serve as our durbar-hall," said Sir Dugald, "and the attendants of the Ethiopian officials can remain on the verandah. This inner court must be sacred to the ladies, so that they may go about unveiled. No Ethiopian can be allowed to cross the threshold without an invitation, and only those must be invited who know something of English usages and will not be shocked by what they see. The raised verandah before the house will no doubt serve as a drawing-room. What do you think of the place, North?"

"Good position for defence," said Dick meditatively. "You hold the outer court as long as you can, and then fall back upon the first block of buildings. When that becomes untenable, you blow it up and retire upon the second block."

"Until you have to blow that up too, and yourself with it, I

suppose?" said Sir Dugald. "For the ladies' sake, I must say I hope we shall not have to put the defensive capabilities of the house to such a severe test. Well, gentlemen, we shall meet at dinner. No doubt you will like to get your things settled a little. Your own servants will be able to find quarters in your block, but the rest must occupy the buildings round the outer court."

When Sir Dugald had thus declared his will the party separated, the staff proceeding to their quarters in Bachelors' Buildings, as the first block was unanimously named, and allotting the rooms among themselves on the principle of seniority, while the doctor went house-hunting, with the aid of a minor official who had been left in the outer court to give any help or information that might be needed. Under his auspices a much smaller house, only separated from the headquarters of the Mission by a narrow street, was secured, and thither Dr. Headlam removed with his servants and the famous collection. When the members of the Mission met at dinner they had shaken down fairly well in their several abodes, and after a little inevitable grumbling over accustomed luxuries which were here unattainable, they displayed a disposition to regard the situation with contentment and the rest of mankind with charity. Sir Dugald noted down certain points on which it would be necessary to appeal for assistance to the urbane gentleman who had instituted the party into their habitation, while Lady Haigh promised help in matters which could be set right by feminine intuition and a needle and thread, and peace reigned at headquarters.

It was not until dinner was over and the members of the Mission were partaking of coffee on the terrace, with the lights of the dining-room behind mingling incongruously with the moonlight around them and outshining the twinkling lamps visible here and there in the loftier habitations outside the walls of the house, that an interruption occurred and the quiet was broken by the entrance of Chanda Lal, Sir Dugald's bearer, with a visiting-card, which he handed to his master on a tray.

"What's this, bearer?" asked Sir Dugald impatiently.

"Highness, the sahib bade me bring it to you."

"The sahib? Here? In Kubbet-ul-Haj? Who is he? What is he doing here?" Sir Dugald's brow was darkening ominously.

"Highness, I know not. I said that the *burra sahib* received no visitors this evening, and the sahib said, 'Take this to your *burra sahib*, and tell him that my name is Heekis, and that I wish to see him.'"

"'Elkanah B. Hicks. *Empire City Crier*,'" read Sir Dugald from the card in his hand in a tone of stupefaction. "In the name of all that is abominable!" he cried with lively disgust, "it's a newspaper correspondent, and an American at that, and here before us!"

"I know the name," said Stratford. "Hicks was the *Crier* correspondent who made himself so prominent over the Thracian

business. He was arrested and conducted to the frontier while the second revolution was going on."

"The very worst kind of busybody!" said Sir Dugald wrathfully. "I only wish that Drakovics had shot him when he had him safe. What does he mean by poking himself in here?"

"He is in search of marketable 'copy,' without a doubt," said Stratford, "and he is taking the most direct way to get it. He has a fancy for talking and behaving like a sort of semi-civilised Artemus Ward, which takes in a good many people; but he is considered about the smartest man on the *Crier* staff, and that is saying a good deal."

"Whatever his fancies may be," growled Sir Dugald, "I don't see that they are any excuse for the man's thrusting himself upon me out of business hours without the ghost of an introduction."

"Still, dear," said Lady Haigh, "we had better have him in and be friendly to him. In a place like this white people are bound to hang together, and I dare say we shall find him very pleasant."

"Bring the sahib in," said Sir Dugald shortly to Chanda Lal, adopting his wife's pacific suggestion, but without any lightening of countenance; and presently the bearer ushered in a lank, sallow man, rather over middle age, with a straggling, lightish beard, and hair that seemed to stand somewhat in need of the scissors. As Fitz said afterwards, if he had only worn striped trousers and a starred waistcoat, Mr. Hicks would have represented to the life the Brother Jonathan of American, not English, caricaturists. Sir Dugald received his visitor with frigid politeness, and the staff, taking their cue from him, did the same; but Mr. Hicks appeared to feel no embarrassment, although the tender hearts of Lady Haigh and Georgia were moved to pity on his account. He was duly supplied with coffee, and when Georgia had passed him a plate of cakes he stretched his long limbs comfortably as he reclined in a cane chair, and beamed upon the party.

"It makes one feel real high-toned," he said slowly, "to be waited upon out here at the back of creation by two lovely and cultured daughters of Albion."

Sir Dugald gave him a stony glance in reply, while the younger men, uncertain whether the remark was to be considered as due to deliberate rudeness or to ignorance, wavered between amusement and indignation. Lady Haigh answered pleasantly but coldly:

"We are not accustomed to be treated to quite such elaborate compliments, Mr. Hicks; but no doubt American manners differ from ours. So I have always understood, at least."

"You bet they do!" was Mr. Hicks' reply, delivered with almost startling emphasis. "When your nigger let me in just now, and the General there stepped forward and said, 'Mr. Hicks, I presume?' hanged if I didn't think I had got into a Belgravian drawing-room, or into Central Africa with Stanley, instead of finding a party of

civilised white people in the midst of Ethiopia! I guess I'm not cut out for shows of this kind, any way."

"You prefer a European post, perhaps?" suggested Stratford, as Sir Dugald remained silent.

"You may consider that proved, sir, some! I can fly around with any man in a civilised country, and back myself to send home more 'copy' than the paper can use; but I was a fool to cable back 'Done!' when the Editor wired, 'Can you start for Ethiopia next week, and keep an eye on this Mission business?' Set me down in a telegraph bureau, with a dozen newspaper men there before me and only one wire, and I'll bet you my bottom dollar that my despatch will go over that wire before any of the other fellows'; but when it comes to organising a dromedary-service to carry my 'copy' week by week, it makes me tired of life."

"If you find it so hard to send your letters, how did you surmount the difficulties of getting up here yourself?" asked Sir Dugald, with a faint appearance of interest.

"I must confess to getting along by taking your name in vain, General," returned Mr. Hicks easily. "I travelled around for a week or two in Khemistan, just to throw your frontier people off the scent and to make friends with some of the natives. They smuggled me across into Ethiopia in disguise, and I told the people here that I was sent out to write about the Mission and note how it was received, which was quite true. Consequently I was taken everywhere for an emissary of your Government, which has smoothed the way for me considerably. I guess it will gratify you to know that your name was a passport most everywhere."

"Having heard you were a newspaper correspondent," said Sir Dugald, "I might have guessed what your methods would be."

"We military people," said Lady Haigh, again interposing as peacemaker, "have an odd prejudice against special correspondents, Mr. Hicks. It is awkward, but you must be kind enough to excuse it."

"It's nothing to what I should feel if I was in the General's place, ma'am," said Mr. Hicks affably. "I wouldn't have one in my camp for any money. They might pillory me throughout the Press of the Union, but so long as I kept them off I should smile. Now, General, after that handsome acknowledgment, I hope we are friends?"

"I hope so," returned Sir Dugald, still unsoftened.

"I should like to do a deal with you, General," continued Mr. Hicks. "If you could spare me a minute or two alone, I think I could convince you that we have interests in common."

"Work is over at this time," said Sir Dugald icily. "If I can be of any service to you in any little difficulty with the authorities here, or with regard to the postal arrangements, I shall be happy to see you in the morning. My office hours begin at six."

"Do you wish to name any special time, General?"

"By no means, Mr. Hicks." Sir Dugald fixed a blank, uncomprehending gaze on the American's face. "It is my duty to support the interests of the subjects of friendly powers, wherever I can, and I hope you will attend to state your case at the time most convenient to yourself."

"I guess you don't understand me, General. I can fix my own affairs, thank you. What I want is to arrange a trade. You give me what I want, and I give you what you want, do you see? I should prefer to speak to you in private as to the exact terms."

"Any proposal you have to make to me must be uttered in the presence of these gentlemen, if you please."

Mr. Hicks laughed uneasily.

"Well, your way of doing business licks Wall street," he said. "What I have to say is, you give me the information I may need as to the plans and intentions of your Government, and I will give you some pieces of news without which you will do nothing here."

"You are an accredited agent of the United States Government?" asked Sir Dugald.

"Not at all, sir. I represent the *Empire City Crier*."

"And I represent her Britannic Majesty. I regret that the 'deal' to which you have referred cannot come off."

"Then your Mission will be a failure, General."

"Pardon me, but that is no concern of yours."

"Well, you are the first man I ever knew bring a wife and daughter into such a place as this on such an almighty poor chance. I don't know what you think, gentlemen"—Mr. Hicks wheeled round in his chair and glanced at the rest of the party—"but I say—and I know something about this place—that you have a precious small hope of getting out of Kubbet-ul-Haj with your lives if your Mission does fail."

"You really must excuse my staff from commenting on your interesting piece of information, Mr. Hicks," said Sir Dugald smoothly; "they are not accustomed to be set up as a court of appeal over me."

"May I ask, General, whether you know why Fath-ud-Din, the Grand Vizier, did not ride out to welcome you to-day?"

"I believe he was ill," said Sir Dugald, stifling a yawn.

"He was so sick that he was riding past my house to the bath at the moment you were entering the city on the other side."

"I don't quite see," said Dick, "why a piece of bad manners on Fath-ud-Din's part should be such a fearful omen for us."

"I guess you think yourself dreadful smart, Colonel," returned Mr. Hicks, "but you soldier officers are a bit too cute sometimes. Old Fath-ud-Din is a bad crowd generally, and he means mischief. Leaving him out of account, what do you think has happened to your

friend the Crown Prince, Rustam Khan? Has he dropped in on you here yet?"

"Scarcely," said Dick. "We have not arrived so very long, you know."

"That is so." Mr. Hicks disregarded the sarcasm implied in the words. "But I know something of that young man, and I can tell you he would have been around here like greased lightning if he had had the chance. He was afraid of losing his scalp if he attempted it. The fact is, you gentlemen are behind the times."

"Ah, but we'll be truly grateful if you'll enlighten us a little," put in Fitz, in a most alluring brogue, which he kept for use on special occasions.

Mr. Hicks glanced sharply at Sir Dugald. The slightest sign of interest or eagerness would have determined him to impart no information except at a price, but the look of repressed weariness which was just visible in the half-light served to pique the American into doing his best to surprise and startle his bored and scornful host. He leant back in his chair with his thumbs stuck in his waistcoat pockets.

"We think we are pretty slick in fixing things out West," he said, "but they have by no means a bad notion of history-making out here. When it was arranged that your Mission should start, General, Rustam Khan was in high favour with his father, old Fath-ud-Din was biting his nails in disgrace, and the people were all in love with the English. But we have had a Palace revolution since then. The King's second wife (she is Fath-ud-Din's sister, and they all hang together) gave her husband one of her slave-girls, the prettiest she could pick up anywhere, and that brought her into high favour, and all her relations with her. She is young Antar Khan's mother, and he is prime favourite now, while Rustam Khan and his mother, the King's first wife, are nowhere. Curious what little things bring about these big changes, isn't it?"

"The details of these Palace scandals are scarcely edifying," remarked Sir Dugald, to whom Mr. Hicks had all along been addressing himself.

"Probably not, General; but they are often important, and there is an outside circumstance that complicates this one. From your point of view it was slightly unfortunate that an envoy should turn up a week or two ago with presents and offers of alliance from Scythia and Neustria. I guess those two states are hunting in couples. It's not the first time they've done it, and they generally make a good thing out of it. Does this alter your way of looking at things at all, General?"

"Not at all," returned Sir Dugald placidly.

"Now come, General," said Mr. Hicks, leaning forward and extending a long forefinger to tap Sir Dugald on the knee, "you and I are both white men. We understand each other. I can put you

up to circumventing this Scythian cuss if you will only show an accommodating spirit."

"Really," said Sir Dugald, "I am deeply obliged; but until her Majesty is pleased to appoint me a colleague, I have an invincible objection to sharing my duties with anyone. I cannot sufficiently admire your disinterested and public-spirited offer of co-operation, Mr. Hicks, but this prejudice of mine—foolish and incomprehensible as it must no doubt appear to you—prevents my accepting it."

"Think of your reputation, General," urged Mr. Hicks sadly. "I give you my word I had sooner write the story of a successful Mission than an unsuccessful one any day. We newspaper men have a way of finding out things which you diplomatic gentlemen never hear of, and I can help you through with your work and cover you with glory as well. You'll take it?"

"No, thank you," returned Sir Dugald. "It is all prejudice, of course, but somehow I had rather not."

"There are just a few people left in the world who prefer honour to glory," cried Georgia, her eyes flashing.

"What an unkind remark, Miss Keeling!" said Sir Dugald. "You will really wound my feelings if you impute motives to me in that reckless way. Well, Mr. Hicks, I hope we shall see more of you. Lady Haigh is always at home on Friday afternoons, and if you like to drop in to tiffin any day we shall be delighted to see you."

Mr. Hicks had not been intending to depart so early, but at this intimation he rose reluctantly and took his leave. North and Stratford escorted him to the door, and when they had returned to the terrace a sense of constraint seemed to fall upon those present. Sir Dugald's impassive face told nothing, and his eyes were fixed on a distant point of light in the city. He was the only one of the party who recognised the full importance of the piece of news which had just been announced, but all perceived more or less distinctly that the enterprise on which they were bound had received a check. It was Georgia who broke the silence at last.

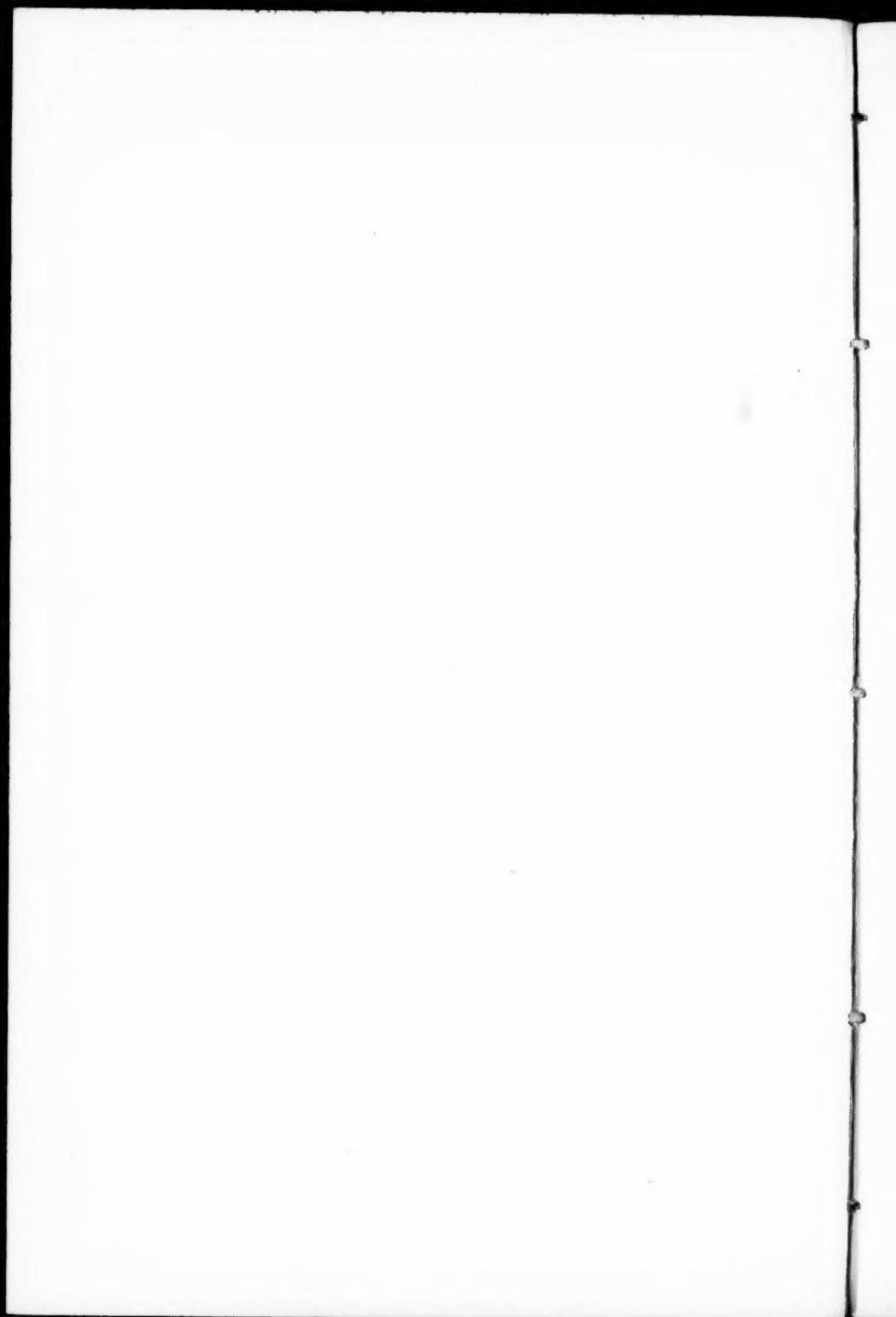
"Sir Dugald," she said boldly, "won't you say something? We couldn't help being here and hearing what that man said, and we should like to know what you really think, just to hear what we have to expect."

"I have never pretended to be a prophet," said Sir Dugald, looking round with a half-smile, "and I fear I am not much in the habit of stating publicly what I really think. Still, after what has happened to-night I will say that our task is certainly very much complicated by what our American friend has told us, though I see no reason for wailing over it as impossible. Palace revolutions are tolerably frequent in these countries, and Rustam Khan may be in favour again to-morrow. Of course the news about the Scythian agent is bad, but we do not hear that any treaty has been concluded, and we are now on the spot. If the people are reasonably well affected towards us, or are



"It's NOTHING TO WHAT I SHOULD FEEL IF I WAS IN THE GENERAL'S PLACE, MA'AM," SAID MR. HICKS AFFABLY.





even keeping an open mind, the advantages we can offer ought to convince them that it is to their interest to make friends of us. They appeared friendly enough this morning."

"Hicks told us at the door," said Dick, "that the King and his Amirs were very much divided in opinion, some of them advocating the alliance with us, some that with Scythia, and others that the old position of isolation should be maintained. The worst of them, he says, is an old fellow called the Amir Jahan Beg, who is Rustam Khan's father-in-law. 'He is the dearest-headed old reactionary I ever saw,' Hicks said. 'All the other fellows turn round in the street to look after me and show a little interest, but this old cuss rides right on and takes no notice. The other day I sent my servant to suggest an interview, and all the answer I got was that the door was shut.'"

"Rather good, that, for Jahan Beg," remarked Stratford.

"But if he is Rustam Khan's father-in-law he may persuade him to take sides against us," said Dr. Headlam.

"We can do nothing until we see how the land lies," said Sir Dugald. "To-morrow, when the King receives us for the first time, we shall get some idea of his attitude towards us, and we can take steps accordingly. There is only one thing that I must specially impress upon you, gentlemen: be careful when you are in company with Hicks. Even after his failure to-night I haven't a doubt that we shall see a good deal of him. I invited him to come here now and then because I thought we should be acquainted with his movements occasionally, at any rate, and he accepted the invitation as likely to give him a means of finding out what we are doing. Of course he will bribe the servants here and at the Palace to bring him news; but he will certainly not neglect us. Therefore be careful what you say. I don't want to misjudge the man, but he might not be above the temptation of taking steps to secure the fulfilment of his prophecy as to the failure of the Mission. In any case he might do a great deal of harm by sending home exaggerated or distorted reports of what had actually occurred. General conversation is the safest—no private talks. I would not answer even for you, Stratford, in the hands of a *Crier* interviewer, although you are a past master in the art of mystification. Even if you said nothing, that is not necessarily a barrier to his crediting you with a long oration. There is safety in numbers, for he could not derive much political capital from a conversation held in the presence of the whole Mission. Our policy is to show a united front."

"If only that wretched man had never come to Kubbet-ul-Haj to spoil everything," said Lady Haigh, somewhat ungratefully, it must be confessed, in view of the information imparted by Mr. Hicks.

"Oh, don't abuse him!" said Sir Dugald. "It is his business."

(To be continued.)

ARTHUR DURHAM.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

I.



IN a rural part of a well-known county of England, one boasting a cathedral-town for its chief city, which city we will call Closeford, there stands a red-brick building, hideous as Buckingham Palace in its style of architecture, and almost rivalling it in size. It seems to have been built for strength, certainly not for ornament; and the traveller, as he gazes at its staring wings, its small windows, for the most part protected by upright iron bars, and then sees the luxuriant, well-kept acres of pleasure-grounds that surround it, halts on his road and inquires what the place can be.

"The Lunatic Asylum."

One traveller, in riding past it many years ago, received this reply to his question, and upon hazarding further remarks, found he had unconsciously addressed himself to one of the resident surgeons. He learnt that the new-fashioned system of rational and gentle treatment was pursued in it, and the conversation that ensued ended in his being invited to go over the establishment. It was an invitation that was gladly accepted, for, somewhat singular to say, the business which had called him down from his own metropolitan home had reference to the affairs of one living in the not very distant county-town, who had recently shown symptoms of aberration of intellect. The surgeon called a man to put the stranger's horse in the stables, and they went in together.

The results of the system appeared to be eminently satisfactory, so far as a cursory visitor who was not a medical man could judge. Men and women, each in their separate departments, walked about, unrestrained, conversing cheerfully with each other, and passing the time rationally. A few were reading, several of the ladies working, one was trying over a piece of new music, her touch on the piano exquisitely sympathetic, and many were busy in the garden, over the flower-beds. All were, in reality, under strict watch, but it was a watch they suspected not.

In an apartment on the ground-floor, an ornamental flower-basket, heaped up with flowers recently gathered, stood on the table, and a young lady was making them into a wreath. A slight, graceful girl,

dressed in white. As the two gentlemen entered, she rose from her seat, and held out the wreath towards the doctor with a beaming smile. "It is nearly finished."

The stranger took off his hat and bowed. He presumed he was in the presence of a daughter of the principal of the asylum, or possibly a child of the gentleman then with him. The medical man carelessly took the wreath in his hand.

"I don't think you have well assorted the flowers, Maria," he observed. "Here are a pink, rose, and carnation next each other, and the colours do not harmonise. I should put jessamine between them, or some of this clematis; anything white, by way of contrast."

She acted upon his advice, the stranger meanwhile admiring her excessive beauty. He had rarely seen it equalled. Her features were refined, delicate, and very fair, her hair light and curling, and there was a sweet, earnest expression in her blue eyes.

"Is that better?" she said; and the surgeon nodded.

"Do you like it?" she said, holding out the garland towards the stranger. "It is not quite finished. I have still a little more to do to it."

"The flowers are lovely," was his reply, "and to my thinking well assorted. You are doing this for some one of your unfortunate inmates?"

Scarcely had the words left his lips, when the surgeon turned hastily to him with a look of caution. But the young lady was quick as he, and spoke, her voice sunk almost to a whisper.

"It is for my bridal. But you must not tell. They are gone for the orange-blossoms. I am ready, you see," touching her white dress, "all but the veil and flowers."

"Good mercy!" uttered the stranger, involuntarily; "*she* a victim! So lovely—and apparently so sensible!"

The doctor turned to leave the room, motioning his visitor before him. He looked back as he reached the door.

"Get on with your task, Maria," he observed. "I shall be here again presently. Why, you were deceived!" he said to the stranger, as he closed the door.

"Completely. I thought it was some young lady belonging to the authorities of the establishment. She spoke so rationally; and there was no madness in the expression of her eye. What can have brought her here, so young and so exquisitely beautiful?"

"The same cause that mostly brings others of her sex, when they come in their early youth. An affair of the heart, as it is called. Her marriage was suddenly broken off, and she lost her reason. It was a deplorable thing."

"Is she incurable?"

"I fear so. But time, in these cases, will occasionally work marvels. She is from this neighbourhood: her father a clergyman, Dr. Remar."

"Dr. Remar!" repeated the stranger. "I heard a gentleman of that name preach last Sunday in the cathedral at Closeford, a Dr. or Mr. Remar. A tall, thin, pale man, but peculiar in his looks. His hair, quite white, though he did not look old, was worn rather long."

"Yes, that's her father. He has a stall in the cathedral: is in residence, probably, just now. When this affair happened, more than two years ago, his hair was as brown as mine. He has recently lost his wife. Poor things! Maria was their only child."

"But the simple breaking off of a marriage," urged the stranger, "seems scarcely sufficient to deprive a person of reason. The circumstances attending it must have been out of the common order."

"I believe they were. I don't know the exact particulars, for the reports that went abroad at the time were too contradictory to be relied upon. Some exposure took place the day before that fixed for the wedding: certain details of the gentleman's former life came out, I fancy, which were not to his credit. He was a clergyman, too."

The stranger's time was up. He thanked his companion for his courtesy, mounted his horse and rode off, his thoughts dwelling, not so much upon the "system" he had gone in to witness in its working, as upon that unfortunate girl and her brilliant loveliness. And again he marvelled what causes could have been sufficiently powerful to place her there.

Should the reader wish to know the same, he can now learn the particulars which the surgeon could not give. They are no secret to many living in the locality.

One afternoon, about eighteen years ago, a lady and gentleman were seated in one of the rooms of a handsome, though not large house, in Norfolk. The land around was productive, well kept and well cultivated; and the long meadow grass, and the healthy ripening corn, spoke to the eye and heart of Plenty. It was no ancestral property, this, descended unalienated from father to son, but a small estate which the gentleman sitting there had recently purchased. The room opened to the lawn by French windows as they are called, and there came dashing to one of these a child of six years old, followed by a maid-servant holding a bonnet in her hand, both looking red and flurried.

"Lavinia!" exclaimed the mother, "I thought you were already gone. Good Heavens! she is crying! What is the matter?"

Uprose Mr. Glynn, himself and his nerves shaking at sight of the tears: as the foolishly-fond parent of many another child has risen up before him. The nurse attempted to explain, but the young lady stamped her feet on the floor, and talked more loudly than all.

She was a pretty child, though just now she looked like a pretty little fury, her face crimson, and her keen black eyes flashing.

"What have you done to her, nurse?" demanded Mrs. Glynn.

"I have done nothing to her, ma'am. I have not spoken a cross

word, or laid a finger on her. While I was getting her ready, she suddenly demanded to have her best things put on, and because I did not comply, she flew into one of her passions. Look at her bonnet here! with both the strings torn off; and if I had not got it from her she would have ripped it to pieces."

"I *will* have on my best things, I *will*," raved the young damsel, bestowing a few gratuitous kicks on the maid's legs. "How dare she say I shan't? They are not hers."

"These oft-repeated scenes are most lamentable," bewailed Mr. Glynn, his usually quiet tones querulous with agitation. "I cannot think, nurse, but you must be in fault. You have not, perhaps, the knack of managing little ones. I don't hear of other people's children being thrown into these distressing passions."

"I have repeatedly told you, nurse, that I cannot and will not have this," broke in Mrs. Glynn impetuously. "You must keep her calm, at any sacrifice. You know what the doctors say, that she is one of the most excitable children living. She will be laid upon a sick-bed, one of these days, through your injudicious contradiction, and her health ruined."

"I have no objection to her putting on her best things," retorted the servant rather sharply, "but I know the state they will be in for Sunday, if she does. She trails along every dirty place she can find, and gets into the ponds, and tears through hedges, and it's beyond the power of any mortal man or woman to prevent her."

"Lavinia, my darling," cried Mrs. Glynn, with some silent suspicion that the nurse's words might prove true, and were so, "this frock is a very nice one—quite as pretty as your new silk."

"It's a nasty frock, it's an ugly frock!" squealed the young lady, louder than ever, as she commenced a frantic dance about the room. "I'll tear it to pieces if you make me wear it! I want my best frock, and my new hat."

"My poor child! my sweet Lavinia!" uttered the dismayed father, "don't excite yourself in this fearful way. Good Heavens! Mrs. Glynn, the child will have brain fever! Why don't you give her what she wants?"

"Go with nurse, my precious, and have everything you want," implored Mrs. Glynn. "It is all her fault; she has no business to contradict you."

So the young lady brought her dance and her sobs to a stand-still, and flew out of the room, followed by the attendant.

"It is all that servant's fault!" ejaculated Mr. Glynn.

"Of course it is," assented his wife. "When the child's properly managed, she is a perfect little angel."

A very nice angel indeed!

"Well?" exclaimed a fellow-servant, looking out of the kitchen, as the nurse and the little tyrant passed the door.

"The same as usual," cried the nurse, in an aside answer. "She

has got her will, and I am to change her clothes. But I know what; every time that master and mistress give in to her in this blind way, it is a nail in their own coffins. Mind if I don't tell you true!"

"I know I'd cure her, if she was a child of mine," was the muttered answer. "I'd put her under the pump, when her fiery fits came on, and pump on her till she was cool."

Now this scene really occurred, word for word: and similar ones had been occurring ever since the child's infancy. Some will be inclined to ask, Is it possible that any parents can be found so culpably foolish? It is not only possible but certain, that the parents of her who is here called Lavinia Glynn were so; and there are such still in the world.

The child was naturally of strong passions; her love, her hatred, her generosity, her vindictiveness, all were in extremes; and she had an inordinate share of self-will, what we are apt to term "obstinacy." This should be checked in all children, but especially in one like Lavinia Glynn; should have been constantly checked from her earliest youth. Instead of which, it was fostered by every possible means.

By the time she was a few years older, the scenes of passion and tears had ceased, for Lavinia carried her wishes without them; and obedience to her every whim was become so much a matter of custom with her parents, that resistance was never thought of.

It was attempted, however, once. Mr. and Mrs. Glynn had gone to London for medical advice for the former, who was always ailing, and were staying at a private hotel in Jermyn Street: Lavinia, who was then about fourteen, of course with them, for they would as soon have thought of trying to fly, as of stirring without her. It happened to be Epsom race week; and, to their astonishment and perplexity, Miss Lavinia announced her intention of "going down to the Derby" in the company of some people with whom she had picked up a speaking acquaintanceship, at the same hotel. Mr. Glynn exhausted all his persuasion ineffectually, and finally told her she should not go.

Should not—to Lavinia? He might as well have told the tide not to flow on, as Canute once did. She flew out with a little of her old violence, and set him at defiance, declaring that neither he nor anyone else should oppose her will. So, poor, weak man, he made a compromise; that is, he tried to make it; and proposed to procure a carriage and take her down to Epsom himself. But that did not do for Miss Lavinia; she should and she would go with those who had invited her; and the next morning Mr. and Mrs. Glynn had the satisfaction of seeing her get into the crowded hired barouche of these strangers.

Oh the fruit! the fruit!—the fruit that an education, such as this must bring forth on a child! Mr. and Mrs. Glynn lived to reap it. Better that God had taken her in her sinless infancy.

II.

THE storm was nearly over: and the sun, bursting forth from the verge of the horizon, for it was near its setting, caused the drops to glisten on the trees, and lighted up the hills in the distance. The clouds were disappearing from the sky, leaving its deep blue visible, and giving promise, now, of a calm night, whilst the sweet odour arising from the heated earth was inexpressibly refreshing. An hour before, the scene had been different. Then, the clouds were lowering ominously, faint peals of thunder, quickly growing nearer, resounded in the still air, and heavy drops of rain had commenced their descent on the trees. They fell on the bare head of a gentleman, striding impatiently to and fro: he had removed his hat, for it pressed his brow heavily in the sultry heat, and he pushed back his waving hair, wishing for a breath of wind to cool his brow. He was young, probably three or four-and-twenty, of courtly presence, sufficiently attractive in feature and form, but the lines of his face spoke of dissipation, and of a will that knew little bridling. It was a secluded spot, this, to which he confined his steps. Years ago it had been but a young plantation, on the grounds of the nobleman whose estate lay around, but the trees had towered up, in their might and strength, till now they rivalled those of many an older forest. A path lay through the wood, and, striking from the midst of this path, on the right, you came upon a small, grassy opening, in which was a sort of bower, formed by the trees, where rude seats had been placed. On the left of the wood lay the sea-shore, but it could not be seen from that spot. It was in this green opening, so dark and secluded that one, penetrating to it, might fancy himself miles from the haunts of men, that the young man was pacing, and an impatient exclamation at being kept waiting, burst more than once from his lips. But now there advanced towards him, breaking from the dense trees, a form, young and handsome, and the irritated expression left his face, and he started eagerly forward. It was that of Lavinia Glynn.

But Lavinia Glynn grown up to womanhood. Look at her, reader: a fine girl, tall and graceful, with pale, statue-like features, impassioned in excitement, calm in repose: bands of raven hair shade her face, and in her jet-black eye there is a flashing light, a brilliancy rarely seen in women of these more northern climes.

With the increase of years had increased Mr. Glynn's ailments. He had latterly taken it into his head that Norfolk did not suit him; was too damp, or too dry, or too something. So he sold his property there, and took a house for six months in a remote sea-side village in Sussex. And it was there Lavinia met with Mr. Durham.

Who was he, this young man? *She* knew not. She had encountered him soon after their arrival at the village, in one of her solitary

walks on the beach. It may be that each was mutually struck with the attractions of the other: it may be that the loneliness of the place banished from their minds conventional forms and ceremonies, especially the common one of introduction: certain it is they got into conversation, neither quite remembering afterwards which had made the first advance towards it. This one formal meeting had led to many others, and it was to lead to many more.

It was impossible to describe the sentiment with which Lavinia Glynn regarded Mr. Durham. They had now met every day for five or six weeks, ay, more than once in each day, and to designate the feeling which had grown up in her heart for him by the name of love would be to express it most inadequately. A more ungovernable passion never was indulged in: he had become to her all in all; she would have given up heaven at his bidding; father, mother, ties, kindred, all were to her now as nothing, compared with this attractive stranger, who had arisen to usurp every corner of her ill-regulated heart.

What could be expected of a girl brought up as Lavinia Glynn? That she would curb this extravagant passion, when she knew not whether he for whom it was entertained was worthy or not?—that she would at least restrain it within moderate bounds? How can you ask it? When a child, in infancy, is allowed to indulge its every fancy, ordinate and inordinate, in childhood left uncontrolled, in girlhood unrestrained, how, think you, will it fare with the stronger passions of riper years?

Mr. Durham had told her nothing about himself. He may have been a reserved man by nature, though that is not often a characteristic of youth, or he may have possessed some secret motive for not wishing her to know much of himself and his antecedents. All the information he imparted to her was, that his name was Durham, that his parents were dead, and that he was fresh from Cambridge University. What had brought him to this retired sea-coast village? she asked him one day. A love of roving was the reply. He had come to it one morning in holiday idleness, intending to remain a day, perhaps two, and then start off again; but—he saw *her*, and could not tear himself away. Sufficient explanation for Lavinia, but perhaps certain creditors of the gentleman's could have given a different colouring to his sojourn there, had they been so fortunate as to learn the fact.

So their meetings had gone on unchecked, from the few first accidental ones on the sea-shore. There were scarcely any visitors staying in the village, ten or twelve at the most, and these were middle-aged invalids, devoted to themselves and to the recruiting of their own health. They had passed the age of romance, and it was nothing to them that a handsome girl and a good-looking man, both strangers, should appear to be striking up a flirtation; should come upon each other, on the sands, at all sorts of odd hours, and saunter

carelessly away together; now, further up the beach, as if in pursuit of breeze and sea-shells; now, back to the fields; and now, far away towards the forest, out of sight and memory.

In one of their stolen walks they had come upon this recess in the wood, and, tired and heated, Lavinia had sat down in it. Ah! it was better there than in those public promenades, the wide sea-beach, the open fields, the broad wood-path; for Mr. Durham could hold in his that fair hand (which, by the way, was *not* fair, in the romantic acceptation of the term, for though it was delicate in colour, it had never been so in structure), and make love as much as he pleased, with little chance of being popped upon by any staring straggler. And to this spot their steps were, by tacit agreement, henceforth directed, Mr. Durham growing more devoted, and Lavinia more passionately fond of him day by day. But take you care, Lavinia Glynn, that you go not once too often. It may be, you know not the danger that may arise from these repeated solitary meetings, when you are alone with a careless, unprincipled man, and the impetuosity of your own uncontrolled heart! It may be, you do not know the light in which a man of the world *always* looks upon one who can systematically deceive her parents and outrage the usages of custom to be in his society: the little respect he can continue to feel for her! It was an unfortunate thing that Mr. Glynn should have had, just at this time, a renewed attack of the disorder he came to cure. Some days he did not go out at all; others, only for a few minutes, leaning on his wife's arm. Lavinia, therefore, was at liberty to follow her own course. Occasionally, indeed, when her absences were unusually prolonged, Mrs. Glynn questioned her as to how they were spent. "Reading on the beach," or some such plausible excuse, was the ready reply; and it was never questioned. One person, however, knew of these frequent meetings with Mr. Durham. It was a woman-servant of Mrs. Glynn's, Dobson, a maid who had not lived with them very long, but who had wormed herself into Lavinia's confidence. She usually attended Lavinia in her walks—or was supposed to do so; and she entered into the spirit of this clandestine affair eagerly.

"My lovely Lavinia!" exclaimed Mr. Durham, as Miss Glynn came forwards from the trees. "I feared you would never come!"

"Oh, Arthur!" she uttered, "I thought I should have gone mad! I knew you were waiting for me, and I could not get away, for I was kept reading to my father. Had there been a fire in the room, I think I should have thrown the pamphlet into it."

"I imagined that the threatening storm had kept you," returned Mr. Durham. "It seems to be coming on quickly."

"*The storm!*" she thought. "If the clouds carried fire I would joyfully walk through all if it were to lead me to him!—My mother is not well this evening, and is in bed," she said aloud, "and papa is so exacting."

Mr. Durham's remark about the storm seemed soon to be verified. The lightning had become more frequent, more vivid, the thunder was nearer, and the rain fell faster. He passed his arm around Lavinia, and drew her inside the bower for shelter, under its intertwined roof of leaves and branches. She did not sit down, but stood at the entrance, looking out. It may be questioned, however, if she saw or heard the signs of the increasing storm: certainly she did not heed them. She had no sight but for that form beside her, no thought but for that one idol. And had an angel's voice spoken and told her it was a worthless one, she would not have listened or cared.

So there they remained. Mr. Durham whispering all the insinuating deceit that man knows so well how to whisper, and Lavinia drinking it in: not as poison, which she ought to have done, but as the very sweetest incense ever offered up to woman. And the storm soon raged in all its fury and strength.

III.

THE shades of night were gathering on the earth when Lavinia Glynn drew near to her home. It was a solitary house, standing just outside the village, surrounded by a productive garden: grass, flowers, fruit and vegetables, all grew together in that well-kept, agreeable disorder often observable in small country tenements. A privet hedge enclosed it on two sides, in which there was a gate. It was not the front entrance, but Lavinia approached it, went through, and was passing stealthily across the garden, towards the side door of the house, when some one darted out, in a crouching posture, from some high shrubs, and seized her by the arm. Lavinia, albeit a young lady to whom "nerves" were unknown, gave a startled cry. Yet it was only Dobson.

"Where in the world have you been, Miss Lavinia?" was her hurried salutation. "There has been the greatest rumpus: missis and master—— What is the matter?" broke off the servant, as she noticed her young lady more particularly, her strange and hurried appearance.

"I am not well," replied Miss Glynn. "I—I hastened through the rain, and I suppose I fainted and fell. I—I am going straight to my room, and shall not come down again."

"You can't go up to your room till you have shown yourself," interrupted Dobson, authoritatively; and it may here be mentioned that Miss Glynn's confidential familiarity with her servant caused the servant to be familiar with her—a natural sequence, and one that is sure to follow. "They have been sending all over the place, and I was forced to hide myself out here, or master would have seen me, for

he has been dodging in and out like one possessed. I tell you what it is, Miss Lavinia, if you are going to remain out in this way, I can't undertake to cloak it with the pretence that you are out with me. I have been off my head with fright almost, stopping out here in the lightning and thunder."

"Has it thundered so much?" demanded Lavinia, vaguely.

"Have you been deaf or asleep?" asked the girl, looking at her keenly. "It was the thunder that so frightened master and missis: they thought we might be on the sands, in the thick of it. Frightfully loud it was, too!"

"Yes, yes," cried Lavinia hastily; "I forgot. It has given me a headache, and I can think of nothing. I shall go and sleep it off. Call me as usual in the morning."

"But I tell you, you can't go till they have seen you," repeated the servant. "Missis has rung the bell twenty times, inquiring if we were come, and master's more nervous than he has been for months. I have heard it all from here. Hark, he's inquiring again now! Where's Mr. Durham?"

"Gone home, I suppose. How do I know? I left him long ago. What a fuss papa's making! Go in, Dobson; say we stopped on the beach, and that I am tired."

"The beach won't do," bluntly retorted the servant; "the butler went there, and came back and reported that there was not a soul all over it."

"Then make up a tale yourself," answered Lavinia, darting past the maid, "for I tell you I am not going to be questioned to-night. Say the thunder frightened me, and I have gone to bed and can't be disturbed; say anything."

For a short time these clandestine meetings continued to go on, and the bower to be a witness to many a love-vow destined to be broken, as love-vows for the most part are. Whilst they are in progress, let us give a word of explanation about one of the two parties to them.

A few years previously, Arthur Durham—by which appellation we will continue, for the present, to designate him, though in giving the name "Durham" to Lavinia Glynn, he had given one that was not his own—became a freshman at Cambridge. His mother had died in his boyhood, and he had recently lost his father, a clergyman. The property left to Arthur was very small—scarcely more than enough to prepare him for the Church, to which he was likewise destined; for his father, though enjoying an excellent benefice, was a free-living man, and spent in many ways where he might have saved. Before Arthur had been three months at the university he was deep in everything that he ought to have kept out of—bets, drink, rows, racing, billiards, suppers, headaches, and a whole catalogue of other evils, all helping him to become a parson in accordance with our system of education. Now Arthur Durham was a handsome gentle-

manly young fellow, a fascinating companion, and stood high in university favour, not quite, perhaps, with the deans and proctors, but with all the "sets," high and low of his college. The consequence was, that instead of struggling resolutely out of the mud, which was likely to smother him, as a poor man, he dived deeper into it with every term, until at last the state of his affairs was obliged to be made known to his uncle, the brother of his late father, a rich man with an only son. Very wroth, and more shocked than wroth was this good man, when he found that his nephew's substance had gone the way of all circulating metal, that he dared not walk about for fear of certain ominous taps on the shoulder, and that unless the more pressing claims on him were settled he could not show his face again at Cambridge. But he was not so bad an uncle, as uncles go, for though he bewailed and lectured, and lectured and bewailed, making Mr. Arthur, as he fondly hoped, repent to the very end of his heartstrings, he ended by paying all the debts and made his nephew a sufficient allowance to keep him for the remainder of his terms. So back went my gentleman with flying colours, and in another year was as deep in tradesmen's books as ever, and in others more pressing than university tradesmen's. Arthur Durham had not a bad heart, and by nature he was not profligate, but the prevalent dissipation at the university, the reckless society he mixed with there, drew him on almost imperceptibly to himself. He did not like to approach his uncle a second time, and hence his sojourn at that obscure little watering-place; for it was necessary to be out of the way until something was done, though what that something would be was a puzzle to himself. He found the place excessively slow; his own account of it, in writing to a friend, was that he was "bored to death": perhaps that he did not quite leave it (and the world) for a better, was owing to his pursuit of Lavinia Glynn. But gallant amusements being quite "used-up" diversion at the university, Mr. Durham still found himself "bored" considerably, and one desperate day he took heart and pen, and wrote a letter to his uncle full of self-contrition, promises for the future, and prayers for assistance, all jumbled up together as strong as the dictionary could make them.

The answer came: a stern summons. Mr. Arthur was ordered to "come out of that disgraceful hiding" and appear forthwith before his uncle. If he lost four-and-twenty hours in doing so, the old gentleman affirmed he would not see him or help him. And he was one to keep his word.

"Whew!" whistled Arthur, when he received the letter, which arrived about ten days after the evening of the storm. "What will Lavinia say?"

What indeed! Mr. Durham met her as usual that day, and broke the news to her. But, hoping more effectually to prevent remonstrance on her part, he said the summons was from his college.

"Oh, but you may not go! you *must* not go!" uttered Lavinia,

when the full import of the news broke upon her startled mind. "Arthur, you know you dare not go!"

"There is one thing I dare not do," he replied, "and that is, disobey the mandate. You are not aware of the power these college proctors exercise over us, Lavinia. I should be ruined for life if I refused to attend."

"You must refuse now," she impetuously reiterated; "you cannot leave me here alone. I should die of grief."

"Lavinia, my dearest, disobedience is an impossibility, and go I must. But you have no need to let it thus affect you; for I tell you I shall be back the instant I can get liberty."

"And our marriage?" she whispered.

"I am as anxious about all these things as you can be," was Mr. Durham's reply. "Let me obey this summons, and I will see what arrangements I can make."

"Where am I to write to you—what address? I could not live now, in your absence, without writing and hearing daily."

Mr. Durham hesitated: he had told her he was going to Cambridge, and the reader knows he was not. Her question puzzled him.

"I will write and tell you," he said. "I don't know what this confounded mandate may be for. The heads may be going to rusticate me; and I should not like your letters to fall into other hands. I will write, Lavinia."

"Oh, go not away!" she resumed, imploringly. "Last night I dreamt that you went, and the time went on—on—on—and you never returned! The dream was so like reality that I have thought of it all day long with a shudder. Oh, Arthur, go not away! Leave me not!"

He soothed her into temporary calmness, into an unwilling acquiescence, and so departed.

It was late in the evening of the following day when Arthur Durham presented himself before his uncle at his country residence. The old gentleman was pacing his library, a handsome room, well stored with books. He turned sharply round when Arthur entered.

"So, sir," he said, darting unceremoniously into the subject, without preface or compliments, "what has become of all your solemn promises of amendment that you made to me in this very room?"

"Sir," cried Arthur, "I am deeply ashamed not to have kept them."

"Can you advance one argument in defence of your disgraceful conduct?" he resumed, sternly.

Arthur was silent: he knew that his uncle looked with no lenient eye upon the thoughtless follies of youth. Always a bookworm, always, even in boyhood, in delicate health, he had never himself yielded to their temptations, and could make no allowance for those who did. Marrying late in life a wife fond of retirement, he had secluded himself ever since on this his ancestral estate, bringing

up his only surviving child, Durham (a family name: the reason, probably, of Mr. Arthur's assuming it when he was at fault for one), on a most strict, model plan. They don't always answer, though, let them be ever so model.

"I can only advance one excuse, sir," observed Arthur: "the almost irresistible temptations that beset us at college."

"There are no temptations that may not be surmounted," retorted the elder gentleman calmly. "To get into debt, or keep out of it, is entirely at a man's own option. Durham has been at Oxford twelve months, and he is not in debt. He has not lived up to his allowance, and he's younger than you by years."

Whatever may have been Arthur's faults, want of generous feeling was not amongst them, and he remained silent. But it was within his knowledge that his cousin Durham was already soaring a few kites in the air.

"Durham goes as a gentleman-commoner, with an ample income now, and a large fortune in prospective," he observed. "I am known to be a poor man, who will have to get on hereafter by my luck or my brains."

"If your last speech is intended by way of argument," resumed the uncle, "I don't see how it bears upon the case. I should say it tells against you."

It certainly did.

"A very pretty career is yours, to fit you for one of God's holy ministers! Pray, sir, which is deepest in your thoughts—how you shall best get out of debt, or into divinity?"

"Why, sir, the university is not supposed to fit us for—for—religion, and that sort of thing," replied Arthur candidly. "I suppose that comes with the ordination—if it comes at all."

"You may well say 'if it comes at all!'" exclaimed the old man, pacing about in his restless manner. "It is the wretched training of our young divines that is helping to pull down the Establishment. Oh, you may laugh! You don't think it is coming down? I can tell you, sir, that unless a sweeping reform takes place, on more points than one, in a century's time we shall all be dissenters. And the Reformed Church will be left to take care of itself—without its revenues, though," added the speaker shrewdly.

"What an old croaker!" soliloquised Arthur.

"How is a minister of God prepared for his holy office? How are *you* being prepared?" he continued, wheeling round and facing his nephew. "You went to school, and there you were taught just as the other boys were taught, irrespective of future career: whether to be a soldier, a parson, a rake, no matter; the training was the same for all. Then you went to the university, and what d'you do there?"

"I only do as others do," deprecated Arthur.

"Just so; that's where it is. You learn to dress, and swindle poor duns, and feast and drink, with graver vices that I will not put you to

shame by naming. A few years of this folly, each year growing worse than the last, and you present yourself to a bishop, he lays his hands on you, and you are turned out into the world to take care of other men's souls when you care nothing and know less about your own!"

"What a confounded old croaker!" thought Arthur again.

"Well, there the system is, and I can't mend it, but I know what it will do for England. The people are becoming enlightened, and, one by one, all abuses and anomalies will be swept away."

"Meanwhile, what am *I* to do, sir, to avoid being swept away?" broke in Arthur, coming to the point. "Will you forgive and assist me? I promise, on my honour, it shall be for the last time."

"It would go against my conscience to aid in making him one of these graceless ministers, were it not that they are all alike," observed the old man, speaking rather in soliloquy than answer. "How long is it before you can be ready to take orders?"

"About twelve months," was the reply.

"And in that twelve months, if I set you free now, you will be as deep in debt as ever."

"Sir, again I say I will pledge you my honour."

"Honour amongst university students goes for what it's worth, I expect. I have no faith in it."

"What am I to say, sir?"

"I think the less you say the better, after all you asserted once before. You are my brother's child, Arthur, and I perhaps ought to give you one more trial. Get back to college, hasten your studies there, and give me in the list of your debts."

"You are more generous than I deserve, sir—than I expected," exclaimed the young man, the tears rushing to his eyes.

"Get yourself made a parson as speedily as you can—and a choice specimen you'll make, to judge by these antecedents."

"No worse than the generality of them, sir," replied Arthur Durham.

IV.

It would seem that Lavinia Glynn's dream had been prophetic, for Mr. Durham never returned. One letter came from him in the first week of his departure, which stated that he was leaving Cambridge for the house of a relative, and it was uncertain when he should return to the university; but he would write again shortly.

He never did write. And as the days, the weeks passed on, and there were no tidings from him, no sign of his return, no proof even that he was still in existence, Lavinia's state of mind was terrible. None can describe the fierce, conflicting passions that waged war in it. She would wander and watch through the livelong day, now pacing fiercely in their old resorts, now haunting the post-office with

inquiries for letters, till that edifice began to think her a troubled spirit, and now she would prostrate herself in that wide forest, in its dreary solitude, and call upon his name in her uncontrolled anguish, and cry out for him to come back to her. But he never came; he was only proving himself another of those faithless cavaliers, celebrated in the song of the "Baron of Mowbray," who love and ride away.

And that was all Lavinia Glynn's requital for her insane worship. Very bitter, no doubt, but very natural.

We shall soon come to Maria Remar. I had hoped to get the whole history into one paper, but it has lengthened itself out. It's no fault of mine; and patience, dear reader, is wholesome for us all.



BEQUEST.

IF I should leave you in the summer-time,
Stay not where ghostly arms the willow waves,
Where church bells mark the hour with mournful chime,
Where flowers are fading over new-made graves;
But go where human effort steadfast stands—
Comfort the weak hearts, help the willing hands.

Or if I leave you in the winter-time,
Stay not beside the ashes of the fire;
Go forth amidst the city's want and crime—
Uphold the righteous will, the high desire.
Let morning suns on deeds of duty fall—
These be your tears and my memorial.

C. E. MEETKERKE.



THE VALLEY OF THE RHONE.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "THE ROMANCE OF SPAIN," "IN LOTUS LAND," ETC., ETC.



LIDDES.

MARTIGNY itself had very little to recommend it, but its surroundings were beautiful. Few would stay here, but it is a rallying point for many lovely and widely diversified excursions. From hence you may easily reach the Rhone Glacier and survey that wonderful field of perpetual ice, with its sharp needle-like peaks pointing to the skies. Or you may pass onward to the Italian lakes where luxuriance of vegetation and the deep blue of the heavens charm the eye. Or you may rise early in the morning, as we did, and take the long drive full of indescribable splendours to the monastery of the Great St. Bernard.

We had arrived at Martigny towards sunset. Madame at the *Hôtel du Cheval Blanc* was everything that was hospitable. Her one anxiety was that we should be comfortable. She was tall and substantial, with a face and expression brimming over with good intentions towards mankind in general and ourselves in particular. We shall never forget the morning we left for good and all. As we stood waiting at the door for the omnibus to take us to the station, she came forward and in a most motherly way put her hand upon our shoulder and said with anxiety and good-nature in tones and eyes :

"You have been pleased with the hotel?"

For an instant we really thought the hand on the shoulder was only the introduction to a more demonstrative leave-taking. But when we assured her earnestly that we had seldom been more charmed, the

hand slipped away, she gave a sigh of great contentment, and said : "Then you will come again?" But this is anticipating.

Madame's daughter took her place in the bureau, where madame was never to be seen.

We wondered where mademoiselle had found her great beauty : her well formed face and features, her soft dark blue eyes and damask-rose complexion. She spoke English admirably and had very gentle manners. H. C.'s susceptible nature at once fell prone before this new divinity.

The garden in front of the hotel was beautifully kept ; full of flowers and trees and cunningly disposed benches. A fountain plashed musically in the centre. Here H. C. would take up his station, gazing for long intervals upon the windows of the bureau with dreams in his eyes and poetry in his mind.

A truly poetical scene was before us as we wandered down the road towards the river. It was spanned by a covered wooden-bridge, and beneath the high arch the water rushed in a swift torrent. Rising above it, crowning a high hill, was an old ruined castle belonging to the earlier centuries. Far up the valley and far down, we traced the course of the rapid water. Here the Drance flows into the Rhone, and Martigny has suffered severely from occasional inundations. This makes the place unhealthy and malarial at times. All about us were snow-capped mountains flushed with the rose of sunset. The valley was just wide enough for the river and the town.

The latter has no feature of interest. Its church was not beautiful and streets and houses had no picturesque outlines. Here the monks of St. Bernard have a convent to which they occasionally come down. We paid it a visit before leaving, and we shall come to it here in due time.

The hospice itself, far up in the mountains was our chief reason for our present sojourn, but the comfortable hotel and madame's attentions alone would have been sufficient reward. We had long wished to see the famous old place, and make acquaintance with the monks and the splendid dogs.

"A long drive of ten hours," said madame. "You will have to start early, for the sun soon goes down."

"The earlier the better," we replied. "We shall be ready at six o'clock."

"That is a little *too* soon," returned madame. "The sun will hardly have risen. Our mornings are cold and the valleys misty. Seven o'clock would be a better hour for the month of October."

"Then seven let it be," we replied. "You will see to the carriage?"

"A carriage perfectly comfortable," returned madame emphatically, "and a driver *de confiance*. You are wonderfully favoured by the weather. It is veritably summer at last."

This interesting conversation took place at the dinner-table. We

had the room to ourselves, and madame had come in to see that everything was en règle, and to give an eye to the dishes served up by the cook. One or two that for some reason did not please her were returned by flying domestics with a sharp word to the chef to mind what he was about. Everything was excellent and admirably served, and madame was evidently born to her vocation. "*La table d'hôte est la clef d'un hôtel,*" said she to us, as a sort of apology for her strictures.

After dinner we went down the road under the flashing sky, stood on the covered bridge and watched and listened to the rapid course of the river. The stars were reflected upon its surface. The great mountains rose about us in dark outlines. Here and there a light gleamed from a distant cottage. No sound was audible, no creature stirred; the cattle had all gone home and their tinkling bells were silenced; the long white road by the river side was deserted. Only the rushing of the water broke the stillness of the air; a sound full of charm and grandeur, suggesting strength and life and movement, harmonising with the giant hills.

There was a crisp coldness in the atmosphere that told of autumn, and we realised that madame was probably right in suggesting six in the morning as an uncomfortably early hour for starting. We realised its truth still more when we were roused about that hour to consciousness, and on opening the window found the air sharp and the stars still faintly visible in the sky. These paled and disappeared before the dawn. By seven o'clock we had full daylight, but as yet the sun was behind the mountains.

Madame had prepared us delightful coffee and hot rolls, after which our powers of endurance were equal to anything. Even shock the first was sustained with equanimity, when our "comfortable carriage" came round and we saw it in all its glory.

We had pictured something soft and luxurious; something very superior to our extended bath-chair arrangement of the previous day. It turned out a very miserable affair, jolting and springless, with hard seats and stiff backs. Evidently it had been used yesterday, and the driver had not even washed off the stains of travel. We gently remonstrated with madame. A few hours in such a shandaradan would dislocate all the bones in one's body: the pleasure-excursion become a funeral cortège.

"Not at all, monsieur," smiled the imperturbable lady, whom nothing put out; not even the suggestion of sudden death. "I assure you, you will find it very comfortable. Du reste, these are the only carriages we have in this part of the world for the mountains. Nothing else would stand the strain. As for jolting, you will not feel it. I never do."

It was all very well for madame to say that, whose bones were so substantially covered. Had she rolled down a mountain she would have arrived safe and comfortably at the bottom. We of Pharaoh's

lean kine had a different tale to tell. But there was no help for it, and we accepted the inevitable.

Madame wished us bon voyage, the driver, dressed in a blue blouse, cracked his whip, and away we went under convoy of one small strong horse.

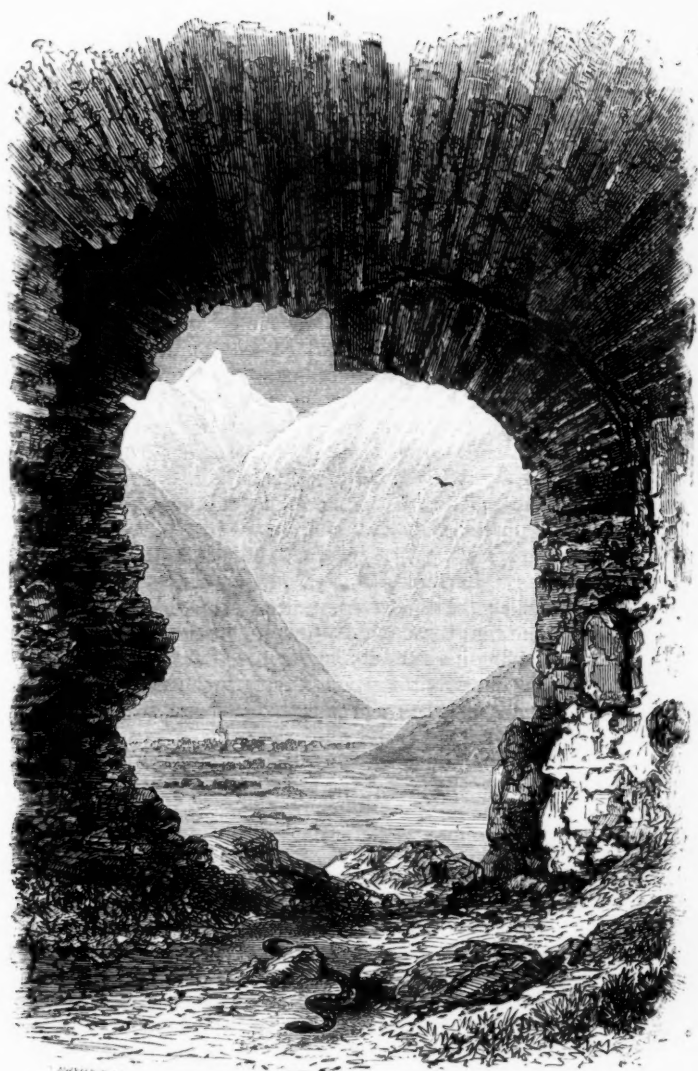
There was not a cloud in the sky, but the sun was still far behind the mountains, and the air was keen. We clattered through the little town, where signs of life and awakening had hardly begun to declare themselves. Only the baker sent forth from his open door a delicious steam and perfume of hot bread. His trade was so clean and comfortable we wondered all men were not bakers.

From first to last the drive lay amidst the sublime Alpine hills and valleys. Very soon we came up with the river. Crossing an old wooden bridge, we left the road to Chamonix on the right and following the course of the Drance ascended the valley. Presently we had sunshine, and warm summer heat changed everything to paradise. We passed up between the mountains, now narrowing to a gorge, now opening into a wide and fertile plain. Here and there we came to a village picturesque with gabled cottages built of wood, now whitewashed, now stained a deep dark brown which made them look centuries old. The people were not very comely or gracious. For the most part they went about their work, nor troubled to throw a glance at the rattling cavalcade. Occasionally we passed a saw-mill with its picturesque waterwheel turning and creaking.

The bed of the river deepened as we ascended, until we looked into shuddering depths. Nothing could be more beautiful and romantic. Far down, the water frothed and swirled round the rocks it met on its course. The precipitous sides were a wealth of greenery, ferns and wild-flowers.

Then the deep gorge passed away and far up the valley the white stream might be traced like a silver thread. The sun was high in the heavens and flashed upon the water. The air was so rarefied that everything stood out clearly and distinctly to the very tops of the hills. The whole journey was a dream. It was not rapid travelling, for the driver would not hurry himself; and there was so much ascending that too often we could not get beyond a walking pace. It did not matter. We felt that two miles an hour in such scenery was very fair speed.

At Orsières we were 3000 feet above the level of the sea. It was a small town or village with a curious old tower overlooking the valley. Here we crossed the Drance over its deep bed, and behind us towered the great Mont Velan, with its snow and ice and splendid glacier. It is a difficult excursion, but may be made by those who have had much practice in mountain climbing. The views from the summit are magnificent, reaching to the Lake of Geneva. Beyond Orsières the valley widened into broad pastures, the home



W. H. R. S.

VIEW FROM THE OLD TOWER AT MARTIGNY ABOVE THE BRIDGE.

of countless cattle; of cornfields and vineyards that flourish in their seasons.

About midday, we reached Liddes; where we waited for luncheon and changed our horse, carriage and driver. As we had not sent word that we were coming the inn-people announced that they had nothing ready. H. C. declared himself hungry as a hunter, and we capitulated for a very substantial omelette and unlimited bread and butter: archaic but grateful fare, whilst a bottle of excellent Lamarque was a very good substitute for nectar. It is a *vin du pays*, and though not dating back quite to the days when the gods flourished on Olympus, was well known and appreciated by the Romans.

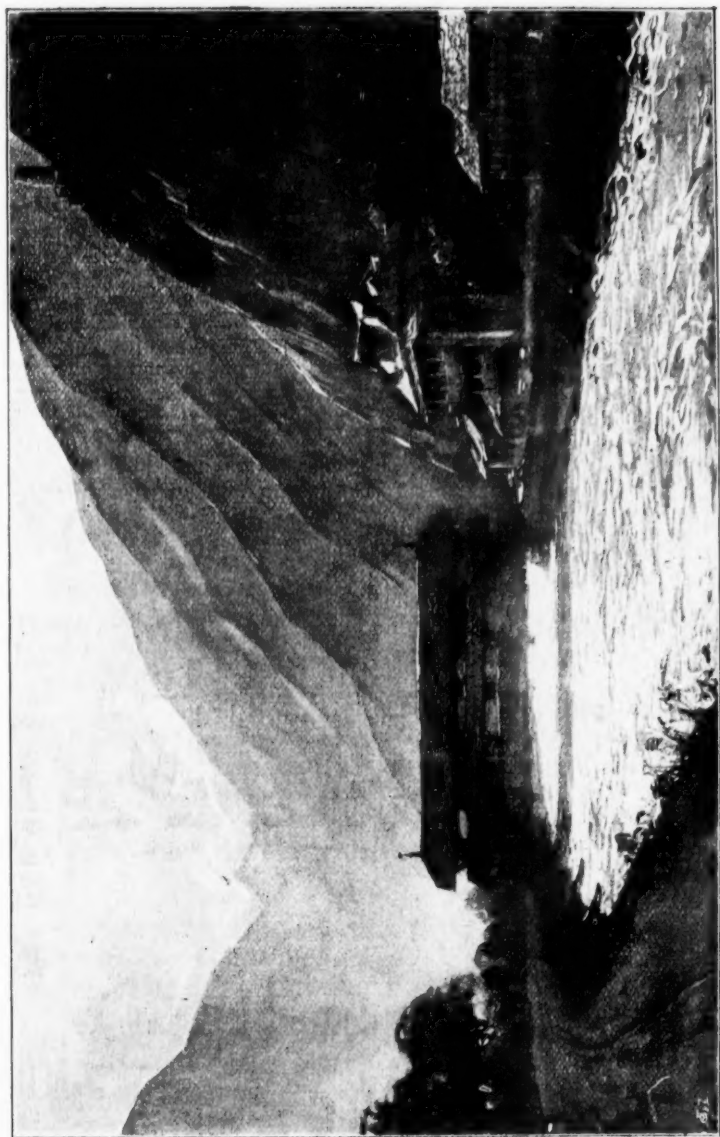
Liddes was very picturesque with its narrow crooked street and dark gabled houses. But it was frightfully dirty, and when, after our pristine refreshment, "energised" by the excellent Lamarque, we started to walk in advance of the carriage, we found ourselves in a slough of despond. Our new driver had had to be fetched from the fields, and we were ready before he had made his appearance. Once in the slough of despond there was no turning back.

The little houses had deep, overhanging eaves. Some of the houses were brown with age and colouring, others were new and white-washed, and rather disturbed the harmony of the scene. At the end of the street uprose the village church, with an interesting tower and short steeple that sharply cut the outlines of the mountains beyond.

Here too the village people were not attractive. The old men and women looked bent and withered, as though hard work and poor fare had been their lot in life. The younger had a certain comeliness inseparable from youth, but no real beauty to boast of, and their dress was commonplace. In the small village square, we came upon the village pump: a tall wooden erection, at which a woman stood in the sunshine drawing water, her hair neatly braided, a small white shawl over her shoulders, a red petticoat made short enough to display a well-stockinged leg and a neatly turned ankle showing just above the wooden *sabot*. She was the only picturesque woman we encountered throughout the day.

The gabled cottages forming the square, with their wooden balconies and plaster walls were charming in outline: the true chalet of the country. The roof had need be strong, for in winter it is often almost crushed in by the snow: and the streets without the aid of the snow-plough are impassable. It is then that people wander away and get buried in the white mantle which falls so silently, and are found dead and frozen, with more often than not an expression of calmness and rest upon their faces: as though the dark-winged Messenger had cheered the entrance into the still darker Valley.

In a corner of the square, a small crowd of women had clustered round a couple of packmen who were perambulating the country with their snares, just as they do in our English villages. They were



MARTIGNY.

unrolling temptations before the women, whose eyes glistened and whose mouths watered. Many a piece of woollen stuff changed hands, lightening the pack. From a great pair of scales they weighed immense skeins of thick white wool, which the women knit into winter garments. They must have something to keep out the cold, since they are not blessed with the rich food and generous draughts of wine of their town brethren.

Sale and barter was carried on with a good deal of quietness; few words passed. The women knew just what they wanted. However much their mouths might water, they had to confine themselves to necessities. Luxuries were eschewed, for they are a poor community. It is a ready-money transaction; credit is only given in the rarest cases, where the purchaser is known to have a warm stocking in the chimney-corner.

We left them to it, and went our way.

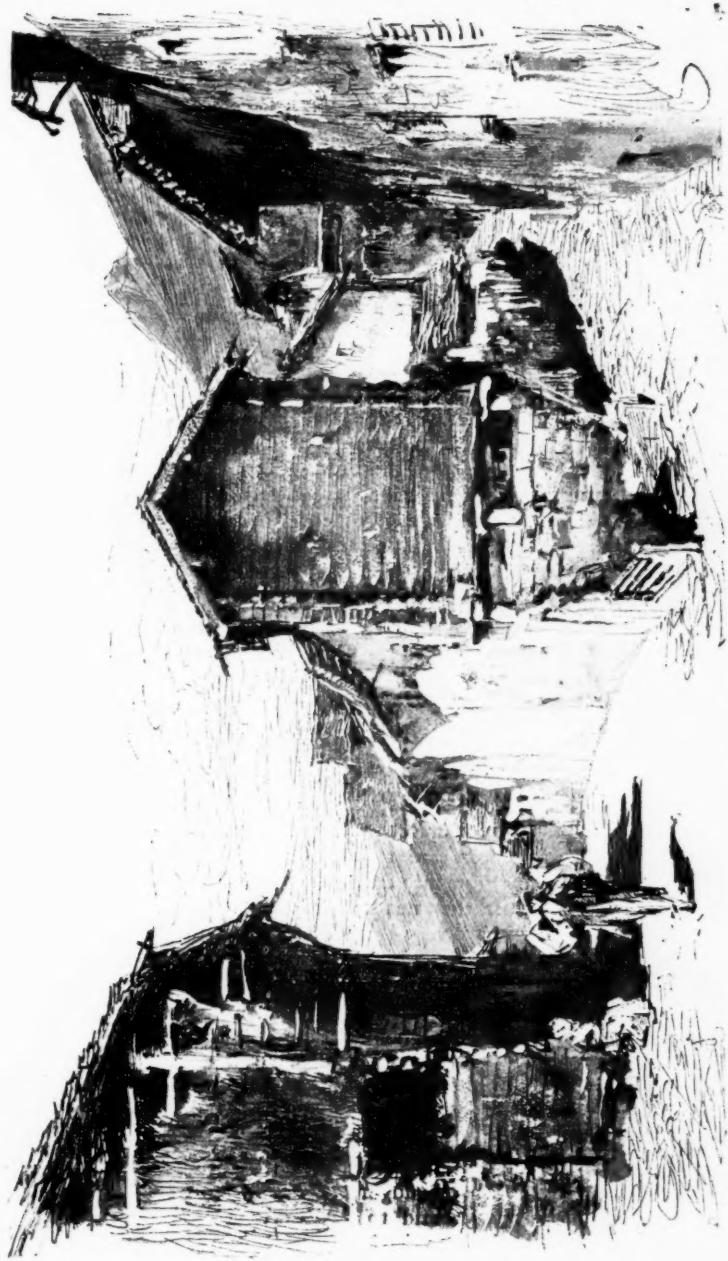
Outside the village we overlooked the broad valley and flowing stream that rushed over its rocky bed under the pine-clad slopes. On one of them, high up, stood the chapel of St. Etienne. The grand mountains uprose pile beyond pile, snow-capped, towering into the heavens, a wonderful contrast to the blue of the sky, the glowing sunshine. The latter, glittering upon the snow-tops with a myriad diamond points, dazzled the eyesight. Up here we were out of the world and in fairyland. It was a deserted land, too, for not half-a-dozen people crossed our path during the whole journey, villages excepted.

Our new driver caught us up at last. He had dressed himself in his best: a short jacket over a shirt white as the mountain snow, and a mountaineer's hat. All he wanted was the Edelweiss to make him perfect. To that he was probably indifferent, having passed the age of youth and romance, of marrying and taking in marriage. Half a century and more had he lived in this workaday world; was owner of the equipage he drove, master of the inn that had given us luncheon, and which he had handed over to the keeping of his son and daughter-in-law.

We found the new carriage as clumsy as the old, but had now grown used to the nondescript affair. Amidst such scenery small discomforts were of secondary importance.

We went on through a series of sublime impressions until we reached Bourg St. Pierre, a large village at the mouth of the Valsory. Its eleventh-century church was interesting, and on a wall near the tower we noticed a Roman milestone. The village was once well fortified, and traces of the old fortifications and an ancient gateway were still visible. Here Napoleon breakfasted when he crossed the Alps in 1800, and the room in the village inn, with its sign, *Au déjeuner de Napoléon*, still exists.

It is a fairly flourishing village, with one or two quaint old houses. Near it is a wonderful botanical garden laid out by the Geneva



ON THE WAY TO ST. BERNARD.

Society, and possessing specimens of all the Alpine flora: flora so beautiful and so abundant. Many a mountain excursion can be made from this point: to the famous glacier of Valsory; to the Chalets d'Amont and the fine waterfall, with the famous glacier in the background; to the Grand Combin, the Maisons-Blanches, the Glacier du Sonadon. From some of the heights the magnificent Mont Blanc range stands out boldly.

Ignoring all excursions, we went our way over the deep and splendid gorge of the Valsory—where Napoleon met with almost insurmountable difficulties in his march. It is a fine road hewn out of the rock, and cuts through the Forest of St. Pierre and the wonderful *Défilé de Charreire*.

This was perhaps the culminating point in our journey. Soon the ascent into the mountains became much more steep and laborious. We seemed to have left the world very far behind.

The sun was sensibly declining, the air growing cold and keen when we reached the Cantine de Proz. Here we were actually in touch with the monastery, for they have a telephone by which they can hold communication with each other. On winter days or nights, when a solitary wayfarer passes the cantine, the fact is telephoned to the hospice. If the wayfarer has not appeared when the full time has expired, one of the monks accompanied by a faithful dog sallies out in search of the wanderer, finds him, administers a cordial and helps him on his way to the hospice. Travellers frozen to death in the days gone by were not at all uncommon, but now it is an almost unknown event.

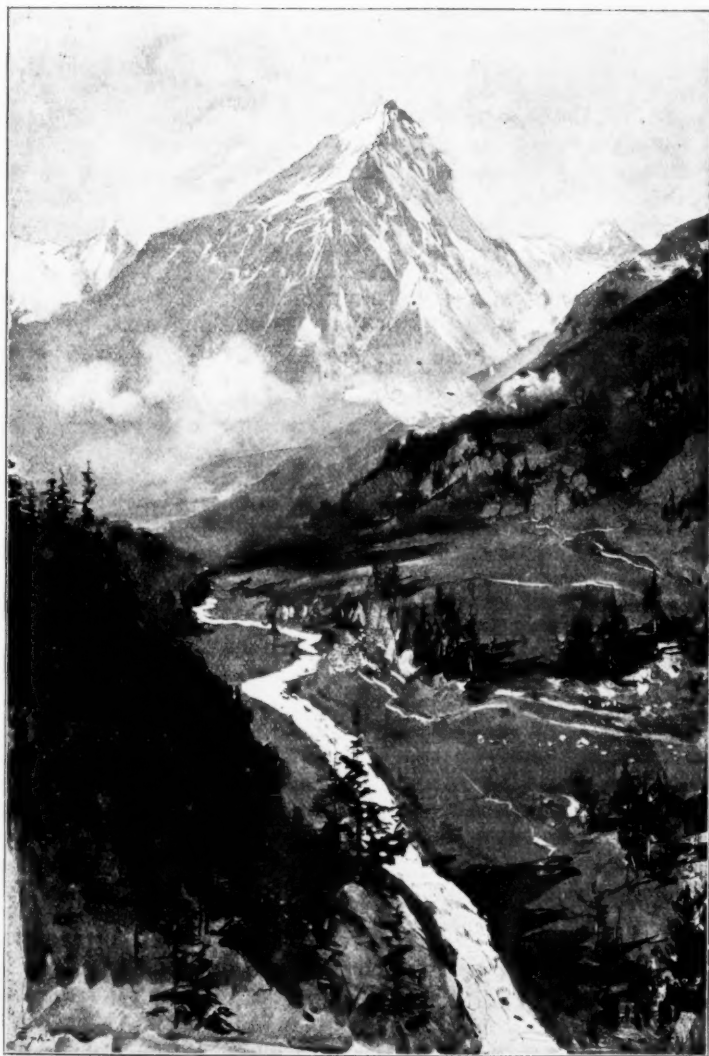
A girl came forward to the door of the Cantine as the driver cracked his whip and drew up. In her arms she held a St. Bernard puppy, large as a good-sized lamb. It was two months old, and its beautiful brown eyes looked at us with almost a human expression.

These animals vary very much, and some of them look as amiable and trustworthy as others are to be cautiously dealt with. This puppy would certainly grow into an admirable dog. He gazed at us pathetically, struggled in the arms that held him tightly, and barked. It was a youthful bark, but very expressive.

"Please take me with you," it said. "I want to see the world. Here my experiences of human nature are limited to these simple folk. They are all very well in their way, but they don't understand the fine possibilities and the grand nature of such a dog as I am. Now you would appreciate me. I would follow you to the ends of the earth, your faithful dog for ever. Don't reject my petition."

Very much what his cousin Bruno had said to us at St. Maurice, but more confidently and youthfully expressed. Bruno had nearly broken his chain when we left: this puppy only shed silent tears. We yielded against our better judgment.

"We will buy him," we said to the girl, "and take him on our return journey. What is his price?"



ON THE WAY TO ST. BERNARD.

"His price is two hundred francs," she replied. "But if you gave four hundred you couldn't have him. He is already sold. We are keeping him for another month, until his master is ready for him."

The puppy perfectly understood; he whined and the tears came into his eyes.

"I don't like him," he said, "and I didn't want him to buy me. He is a rough man who lives in Martigny. He will never talk to me gently or caress me with loving hand; I shall never care for him; and I shall never see the world. Try what you can do for me."

But there was nothing to be done. A bargain's a bargain in the human world whatever it may be in the canine. So we went on our way, and the girl and the dog looked after us until we passed out of sight.

Now commenced, in one sense, the finest part of our journey. Not as regarded luxuriance of scenery, but from the point of grandeur and majesty.

For a time we made way through the pastures of the Plan de Proz strewn with great boulders. Then we entered the rocky defile of the Pas de Marengo. The mountains were closing all about us. Cold and keen and sharp grew the air. Snow was everywhere. We crossed over the Drance to the wild and desolate pass of the Grande Combe. Deep snow lay upon the road through which the little horse struggled bravely. We were fortunate, for very often the road is impassable to vehicles, and travellers have to wade in the best way they can through many feet of snow, finding themselves sometimes half buried in an avalanche. The atmosphere is icy cold. We are approaching the tops of the mountains, and if there is any wind it blows over the snow-fields with a blast that cuts you in two.

We passed through a tunnel made on account of these avalanches, and once on the other side, above us, cold and grey and lonely, stood the far-famed monastery.

It was about five o'clock and still broad daylight. Anything more desolate looking could not be conceived. Our arrival was not expected, and not a creature was to be seen; neither monk nor dog. It was distinctly depressing. A few more struggles through the snow on the part of the horse, and we reached the entrance.

As we did so, two or three dogs came forward. We touched the head of one of them and he snarled and snapped, and just grazed our glove. This was our welcome. After that we did not attempt to make friends.

And there was this characteristic about the dogs of St. Bernard, that they did not seem to wish to make friends with any one. We thought they were kept on short rations, and this possibly makes them slightly savage. It was almost as though they were above the friendship of man, and existed only for their high mission—the searching and saving of life. Whatever the cause, the dogs disappointed us.



HOSPICE ST. BERNARD FROM THE ITALIAN SIDE.

No one came forward to receive us. We had not dashed up to the entrance with the commotion of a coach and four, but silently stealthily through the snow, with no more sound than the messenger of death. Our driver went into the cold stone hall and a loud bell echoed through the building.

In a few moments one of the brothers appeared in a black robe, with cowl thrown back: one of the canons, as they call themselves, the *clavendier* of the establishment. He greeted us with great hospitality and said we were the only visitors who had arrived that day. They had not expected any. By some oversight our arrival had not been telephoned from Proz. The dogs were restlessly moving about. We mentioned the unfriendly welcome we had received from one of them.

"They are out of condition," replied the monk. "It is their feeding-hour, too, and this makes them savage, even with each other. I fear that our dogs are considered by the outside world as a species of canine angel. They have a romantic mission to perform, appealing strongly to human admiration. But their nature is very much that of all dogs. Then we do not train them to be the companions of man, reserving all their sympathies for their work. It is quite true," in answer to a question, "that you must be a little wary of the St. Bernard, magnificent as he is. Everything depends upon the breed; and where there has been a flaw in the disposition of the ancestor, he is capable of treachery. Especially is he sometimes given to attacking the hand that feeds him, the master whom of all others he should defend with his life."

"It certainly is not the reputation he bears in the world," we returned. "But your dogs look a little dilapidated. Have they been ill?"

"Indeed they have," returned the monk, pathetically. "They have had an epidemic we could not master. We have lost nearly all, and have only eight dogs left. Next year and the year after, we hope to bring them up again to something like their proper number."

Thus talking he led the way into the great dining-room set apart for visitors: a very dreary room. The whole place was perishingly cold. There was not a spark of fire anywhere; nor did they attempt to light any. So far they fell short in their hospitality. We had never felt anything like the freezing atmosphere; never anything so penetrating, so icy, so deathly. A long table ran down two sides of the room. Round the fire-place was a large circle of empty chairs, intensely melancholy looking. This was the fire-place of which we had read many a description. An enormous chimney piled up with huge blazing logs that crackled and flamed and cheered the circle of travellers, said those descriptions. What we beheld in reality was a very small grate capable of holding a handful of coals: the crackling faggot and the blazing hearth were dreams of the imagination.

We should have been thankful even for the handful of coals, and

expected to see it appear ; but they made no attempt to light it, and we perhaps erred in not making the request.

The monk then conducted us up the cold stone staircase, through



ARRIVING IN A SNOW-STORM.

dungeon-like passages, equally built of stone, to our bed-rooms. Small windows looked out upon a snow world ; here too the atmosphere was freezing.

"There has been no fire here for a long time," said the canon. "Shall we light one?"

We thought not; it would only draw out the damp, and probably fill the room with smoke and discomfort. The rooms were plainly furnished but very clean, which was more than we could say for the whole of the hospice.

"These rooms are more luxurious than our cells," said the monk, smiling: "but ours are smaller and not so cold. Would you prefer to have cells?"

He was by no means cadaverous and ascetic-looking; one might almost have called him a jolly monk.

"How long have you been here?" we asked him.

"Fifteen years," he replied. "As a rule after living here fifteen years we have to leave and go down to Martigny or elsewhere. Few constitutions will bear more than fifteen years of this perpetual winter climate. It is a great strain. But it suits me; I like it; and I am going to remain on. These mountain solitudes please me more than the town. I like the life; I love the dogs; and it delights me to receive visitors; to go off in search of wanderers."

"Is the search a regular thing?" we asked.

"As regular as sunrise and sunset," returned the monk. "Morning and evening, two monks accompanied by dogs start on their quest: two take the Italian side and two the French side. We never fail."

"Do you ever find any travellers frozen to death?"

"Thank heaven, the time for that is past," returned the monk. "From both sides we can be warned of the approach of travellers. We often find them weary, worn out, half petrified with cold; in that state when sleep may overtake them at any moment. Nay, sometimes they have actually yielded to the insidious influence. Our dogs are in advance, noble creatures! and never fail to find. We see the pause, we hear the deep, strong baying that has in it almost a sound of mingled agony and joy. They know full well what it means, and they seem to rejoice as much as we do. So we now are almost always able to rescue in time. But it is certain that without our help many would perish."

"Are you many in the monastery?" we asked.

"About fifteen of us," he replied. "We are of the Augustinian order, as you know, and may be distinguished by the white cord we wear round our neck, like a long chain. The monks of St. Bernard number about sixty altogether; but we call ourselves brothers. Our head quarters are at Martigny, but we have also a hospice on the Simplon. This of course is our most famous hospice, and from its position—a direct route between France and Italy—perhaps the most needed. But now, before daylight dies, you will like to take a short walk. Dinner will be ready in an hour. You think it cold? We consider it still quite summer. If you were here in our real winter—it will begin next month—you would be almost petrified.

The very paths are mountains of snow. No carriage can approach. Our guests for many months are all poor travellers, whom we have to entertain free of charge, thankful that we are able to do it."

"Are you a rich community?" we asked.

"Alas, we are very poor. We sadly need funds. Such is the increase of travellers, whether for pleasure or other purposes, that we are compelled to begin building a large wing. We never make any charge to our visitors, and you would be surprised how little those give who apparently have it in their power to give much."

"Yet you were once wealthy," we said.

"Very wealthy in the Middle Ages," he returned. "We had many grants. One large grant from Germany; others from many countries. We were recognised as a great necessity, and we had existed ever since the year 960. St. Bernard was our founder, he who was born in an old Château at Menthon in Savoy. Nearly all we possess now comes from Switzerland. Our funds diminish, our expenses increase. At the present moment it is a very serious problem how we shall raise the very considerable fund we are in need of."

The chanoine accompanied us to the entrance, and we went round the mountain path that bordered the lake sleeping to the left, reflecting the mountains upon its cold grey surface. The scene was desolate in the extreme, yet sublime in its grandeur and utter stillness. Though twilight was falling, the white snow still caught and reflected a certain amount of light. The sky above was a deep dark blue, in which here and there a pale star was beginning to shine.

We were now on the Italian side, on the road to Aosta, and from the level of the lake we looked up at the monastery standing out grey and hard against its background of snow mountains.

Just beyond it, on the hill slope, was a building we could hardly think of without a shudder: the morgue, with its dead bodies of travellers lying down or propped up against the wall: bodies that the ever-freezing atmosphere gradually reduces to skeletons without the ordinary process of decomposition. Lights gleamed from the windows of the monastery, and from where we stood we neither saw nor heard any other token of life. It might have been a petrified world. But we pictured to ourselves the joy with which many a weary traveller plodding through fields and mountains of snow, century after century, had caught the first glimpse of those friendly lights, and sent up a thanksgiving for the food and shelter at hand.

If this was summer, what must winter be, we wondered. As we stood gazing, our very feet froze to the snow. A cold night wind crept up the valley. We turned and made our way back to the hospice through the snow path.

No dogs came to meet us this time; they were kennelled for the night. All was quiet. We rang the deep bell in the passage, by pulling a long rope like the rope of a church bell; the bell itself was out of sight.

The canon appeared in a few moments. We were shivering with cold, but evidently as they thought it still summer there was no fire forthcoming; none had been lighted. The next morning he apologised; he feared we had felt the cold; it had never occurred to him to light the fire in the dining-room. We accepted the apology—and regretted the fire. As we stood in the passage waiting for dinner, talking to the monk, out of the darkness there appeared a wonderfully picturesque object: a Dominican monk, on his way to Rome. Here he would pass the night.

He was tall and dignified: a pale, handsome, refined face, dressed in the long black and white garments of his order. The head was well developed and seemed to denote a high order of intellect. Hurriedly the canon procured him some wine, for he looked cold and fatigued. Having taken a small tumbler of it, he passed straight into the chapel, where the Benediction would soon commence.

Our dinner was ready. Never was hot soup so grateful. We stayed not to criticise its quality. One of the servants of the place waited upon us: a man in ordinary dress, who spends his winters at the hospice because he can only get work in summer. It was a frugal meal: a dinner of several courses, but of food so rough that we had to pass most of it. Still, they gave us of their best, though probably in the season of many travellers their supplies are superior and less limited. One ought not to expect too much when approaching some 10,000 feet above the world.

Our banquet was just ending when the sound of an organ smote upon our ears. The effect up in this mountain pass was most weird and curious. Strangely out of keeping with their surroundings were these deep strains of harmony that seemed to shake the building. The canon appeared at the moment.

"Benediction is just over," he said. "Come with me before they extinguish the lights."

We followed him and entered the church, and found ourselves in that semi-obscurity so picturesque and effective. In the dark body of the building a handful of poor people were grouped on their knees. The chancel was lighted up, showing the old stalls on either side. Candles blazed upon the altar. We arrived just at the end. The last notes of the organ died away; the people streamed out; the monk who had been officiating departed to his cell. Lights were extinguished. Only one or two were left burning.

We thought ourselves alone with the canon, and went up to the altar and examined the stalls. Then, with a start, we saw a solitary figure kneeling, immovable as though carved in stone, just in front of the stalls, almost invisible in the obscurity. He faced the altar. The capuchin was thrown back, his bare head was bowed, his hands were clasped; he seemed lost in prayer. It was a weird, dramatic scene never to be forgotten—this praying monk in that solitary chapel in the mountain-pass, remote from the world.

We wondered how long he would stay there after his day's fatigue. For ourselves, cold won the victory. The dimly-lighted dining-room was cheerless to the last degree ; the atmosphere seemed to freeze the



ARRIVING AT THE HOSPICE FROM THE ITALIAN SIDE.

very marrow in our bones ; it was utterly uninhabitable. Outside we could not wander in the darkness. We should lose ourselves ; or fall over a precipice ; or tumble into the lake and drown in the ice water. Or it might be that round that terrible morgue we should see an

assemblage of ghosts, keeping ghastly revels on the frozen snow. There was only one thing to be done—to go to bed.

Once in our room we remembered our flask with its century-old brandy. There is no doubt it saved our life. This, with the fate of Mesdames Sairey Gamp and Betsy Prig before our eyes, we strictly halved with H. C. Much comforted, and piling every conceivable thing upon our bed, we disappeared between the blankets, and gradually unfroze.

In the next room, through the thin partition, we heard H. C.'s teeth chattering. Through the night we were disturbed with occasional groans and sighs and dreamy exorcising of ghosts, as though the whole army of the unburied spirits of the morgue were invading his premises. The mournful building itself was not forty yards from our windows, and though dark the night, its sad outlines were plainly marked against the white snow: a silent tomb full of dead bodies in their winding-sheets, uncoffined, in death unshriven. Well might their ghosts "walk."

The sun rose gloriously the next morning. There was not a cloud in the sky. The hill tops were gilded with sunshine and the shadows crept downwards. We found breakfast much more comforting and agreeable than dinner: plain bread and coffee. In the broad daylight the gloom of the dining-room gave place to a certain cheerfulness. The empty grate was less repelling. Outside, the atmosphere was cold and freezing, but the dazzling sunshine atoned for all.

The canon let loose the dogs, but we were not much more taken with them this morning than we had been last night. They would not make friends with anyone; mankind was not necessary to their happiness. There was a strange restlessness about them, as though they wanted to be off on their search: as though that was to them, the end and aim of life. They had wonderfully intelligent heads and eyes, but not the beauty of the long-haired St. Bernard. The latter does not exist at the monastery.

Walking over frozen snow some twenty feet deep—which made us feel very much as if we were on the edge of a precipice—the canon took us up to the morgue. Through the wide grating of the unglazed window the ghastly procession of the unburied dead disclosed itself. Some were upright against the walls, some had fallen, some were bent double. Their winding-sheets clothed them like another skin, making the skeleton outlines painfully prominent. Before he would allow us to look, the canon looked himself; a keen scrutiny; as though he feared some dead body might have come back to life, and was pursuing unholy rites. But all was silent and still; nothing but the blast of the final trump could ever bring them to life again.

We went round to the lake, blue and beautiful in the sunshine, reflecting the outlines of the mountains. As we stood looking upon the surface, a cavalcade came up the mountain path from the Italian side: a traveller riding a mule, a guide in front, mountaineers



LAKE AT THE MONASTERY.

following behind. Nothing could have looked more picturesque than this little procession, with the lake beneath, and the snow mountains rising in the background. It somehow made us think of travelling in the early ages; brought to our mind scenes and incidents in Sir Walter's undying novels. The horseman dismounted at the hospice for breakfast and rest before continuing his journey on the French side. The dogs came forward and sniffed, and realising that they were not wanted, that he was only a commonplace traveller in no need of rescue, treated him with the utmost indifference.

Out of a small dependance, there came a withered old woman, who begged us to go and inspect her wares: photographs and dried Alpine flowers, and Swiss watches—the ordinary collection of remembrances, which we hardly expected to find up in a mountain pass. Next came our friends the packmen, that we had left displaying their wares at Liddes. They were trudging laboriously through the snow, their great burdens upon their backs—also a very strange sight in this high and solitary region. They too were on their way into Italy. We found that the two men were partners; the one was French, the other Italian; and each took command of the expedition in his own country: diplomatists in their own line.

Then the canon took us into the great stone kitchen, where for the first time we encountered a warm atmosphere. It was well fitted up with all a kitchen's necessities. Next to it was a room crowded with people, many of them poor travellers on their way north or south. Some of them were servants of the hospice. Here the packmen had delivered themselves of their loads, and were being refreshed with coffee and bread. Their long morning tramp had made them as hungry as hunters, and their food was evidently as sweet to them as ambrosia to the Olympians. As this was the only comfortable room in the place, they made the most of it. But these lower rooms and passages were very much like dungeons. The people looked dirty, and everywhere there was a close unwholesome smell, which made our visit a very rapid one. We were glad to get back to the upper floor again.

Here we encountered the Dominican monk about to continue his way to Italy. After all, he could not have spent the whole night on his knees in the chapel. A long sleep and rest had restored energy to his frame and fire to his eye. This morning he was all vigour and animation, a handsome presence, wonderfully striking in his monk's garb.

"I would that we were going the same road," he said to us, "that by companionship we might shorten the journey. But I, as you see, am travelling on foot."

"But you will not walk the whole way to Rome?" we objected.

"No," he replied. "At Aosta I shall probably take train. I am bound on a mission to the Vatican, and that performed, shall take up my abode in Rome for two years."

"The most delightful of all cities," we returned, "full of the remnants of the past, where you breathe an historic atmosphere and walk hand in hand with the early martyrs."

"I fear I care little for your antiquities," returned the monk with a smile. "Signs and symbols of the past do not impress me. Nature has gifted me with no imagination. The present to me is everything. I would rather collect a thousand francs to help this St. Bernard Brotherhood than a million to preserve all the Roman remains in existence."

The canon came up at the moment, and heard the last sentence. We were standing at the front entrance, with all the snow about us. Close to us one of the fine dogs had condescended to take his station. A couple of days' sojourn in the hospice and we should have been great friends. Every now and then he looked up into our face with his wonderful eyes, and a half whine and a restless movement seemed petitioning that we would go off for a long walk with him in the snow.

"It is very deep," said his whine. "Who knows but some perishing creature is waiting for rescue?"

The canon overheard the monk's last remark. "You would be doing a good work," he said, "if you could persuade the world to send us contributions. We are in great need of funds."

"You should make a distinct charge to every visitor who comes to you," we returned. "Especially now that their name is legion. That at least would help you."

The canon shook his head.

"We have debated upon that," he said; "but it does not agree with our ideas of hospitality. It would upset our rules of a thousand years. We cannot do it. Try both of you to get the world to help us."

At this moment our driver came round with his strong little horse and rude chariot.

"Good travelling to-day," he said, bowing to the assemblage. "The downhill path is easy." And there flashed into our mind a verse of Christina Rossetti's.

"Turn again, oh, my sweetest, turn again, false and fleetest,
This way whereof thou weetest I fear is hell's own track.'
'Nay, too steep for hill-mounting, nay, too late for cost-counting:
This downhill path is easy, but there's no turning back.'"

A few moments more, and we had started on our journey.

Our last impression of the monastery was of a grey cold building standing out in sharp outlines against the snow mountains. In the foreground stood the picturesque monk in his magpie garments, and the canon in black and more melancholy dress. The monk had one hand raised, as though speeding the parting guest. Gazing after us with all his eyes was the fine St. Bernard dog. He gave one

sharp distinctive bark ; then another. It plainly said : "I protest against this hasty departure. Come back and stay a week with us. We will give you roaring fires to warm your body and cordials to cheer your heart. Together we will take long walks through the snow in the valleys and over the mountains, and I will be your faithful friend and companion by day, your watchguard by night."

What more he would have said cannot be told, for there was a sharp turn in the road, and we went out of sight.

IN A GARDEN.

BRIGHT o'er the grasses, where a lavish sun
Has netted every blade with web of gold,
My roses brim with trembling dew ; and one,
Of wealth grown over-bold,
Spills, as I pass, the perfumed wine
From her sweet lips on mine.

Far off the swallow-breasted cloudlets drift
Above the feathery elms and scented limes,
Whose languid boughs the breezes scarce may lift
Or stir with summer chimes,
But, Ariel-footed, pass between
To kiss their lucent green.

Here, where a virgin lily died last night,
The heavy air is scented with her breath ;
And, lo, another, stately and as white,
Blooms in the place of death !
Ev'n so love's voice, which wakens thee,
Dear flower, quickeneth me.

O mystery of life, that out of grief
Joy should arise, as from a cloud, and sing !
That, like the bud, which bears a perfect leaf
Through travelling days of spring,
My heart, her sorrow being past,
Should break with love at last !

LAURA G. ACKROYD.

ROBINA'S IDEA.

I.



ROBINA was not her baptismal name, but no one ever thought of calling her anything else.

"Why am I so nicknamed?" she would answer an inquirer; "and why do I allow it? Well, you know, it was on account of my small bright eyes. They are bright *still*, I am told. That began it. A friend used to say—we were boy and girl together—I had 'the sharpest little black beads in my head that ever was;' boys are never grammatical: and then my voice, they used to say, rang like a robin's. Of course,

I don't mind! Only people who are loved very tenderly get nicknamed. I wouldn't be called anything else for all the world!"

The "still" and the "used" had a pathetic sound, but when you looked at the speaker you wondered the need for them. She was one of those cheery little souls who never grow old; and you were sure she would go to her grave without a grey hair or a disfiguring wrinkle. The secret of her perennial youth was difficult at first to decide. She was not troubled with the weight of "brains," for one thing, and the mind that works simply doesn't tax the body. But her life had not been an easy one. Death of beloved ones had lacerated her tender heart from time to time; pecuniary difficulties had necessitated wearing economies; love had been crossed by a fatal misunderstanding; and loneliness, so far as natural ties were concerned, was now her portion. If you could have persuaded her that she still looked young, and the "middle-age" stigma she insisted on was an absurdity, she would then declare it was God who kept her youthful for some wise purpose. Her simple child-like faith was her ultimatum. Scientists and doctors might suggest a perfectly healthy body deserved its praise; but this she confessed, with a conviction that compelled silence, was the result of faith. Suffering was an unnecessary evil in the world, she held. The great Founder of Christianity had rebuked its presence as a lack of faith. Inasmuch as God is good and the fount of all being, He cannot produce physical or moral deformity. She taught the doctrine far and wide, and it was often, in nervous cases, of far more use than the whole science of medicine put together.

In figure she was small and cosily plump, with the prettiest dimpled little hands you ever saw. Dimples were her finishing touch of harmony. They lurked merrily in the corners of her mouth when she smiled; there was a mischievous one in the centre of her round little chin, that must have plagued the hearts of her admirers when nature taught her coquettish tyrannies. For Robina had had her train of lovers, and many a good man had offered her the shelter of his heart and home. But the sailor-lad, who had read her wrongly, and who had gone to sea and forgotten her, was the one romance of her life; all that went before was obliterated; there could be nothing to follow. But there was no sentimental repining for Robina. Her heart was too strong, her human sympathies too imperative for self-absorption; and her life, with her invisible years, grew fuller and more unselfish every day. The poor claimed her savings; the sick her mother-services; the sorrowful her tears; the happy ones her dimples. And there was no one in the small country parish who did not love her, or welcome at all times, and under all circumstances, her rosy face and bright eyes.

This was the picture of her that was presented to Winifred Seldon when she came to S—— to stay with her bachelor uncle, Dr. Haynes.

"I hope she will call on you at once, my dear," he said at their first breakfast together. "She is by far the nicest woman about here. And you'd never believe she is an old maid."

"I'm glad of that," Winifred said, cracking her egg peremptorily. "I can't bear old maids. We don't have them in London, you know."

"Don't *have* them?"

"They simply don't exist," she said, meeting his astonished glance over the top of his paper. "No; they are all authors if they are over thirty. And you couldn't possibly call an author an old maid; they'd put you in their books directly. And we are girls in London nowadays till we are thirty."

"You are only twenty-two," he said, looking inquiringly at her handsome face and puzzled at its *sangfroid* expression.

"Yes; I am only a precocious child. I've some years still before I need look up my grammar."

"But you've got to marry," he said, roused at last and laying down his paper. "I intend to see to that. I hear you refused five or six offers this season. Whatever was the use of James bothering to get you presented and all that fiddle-de-dee?"

"Ungrateful of me—wasn't it? But what is your method? I'm curious!"

"Contiguity. And my young partner, Tom Knightley, is exactly the man. He isn't rich, but comfortably off, and not particularly good-looking—but his *brains*! My dear girl, if he isn't at the top of the profession before he's forty, my name's not Dick Haynes! Now you'll see a good deal of him and can't fail to like him, and you must just make up your mind without any nonsense to marry him."

"Does he know of this project?"

Dr. Haynes fidgeted.

"Well, I may have said something or other about you. But—and this is the one drawback—he told me he had no intention of marrying—talks of wedding science and all that stuff."

She pushed her chair back, and walked to the window, and cast a blazing stare across the flower-beds.

"I'm afraid I am unequal to the contest," she said in her cool voice.

The old doctor came to her side and leant his hand on her shoulder.

"Have I vexed you? Taken a liberty?"

She stood so tall and dignified; her blue eyes alight with anger, and the colour deepening in her beautiful classic face. She did not answer for a moment, and he removed his hand and touched the wonderful gold hair gleaming in the sun.

"Don't let's start with a quarrel!" he pleaded.

She turned and threw her arms round his neck.

"If I didn't love you, and only you in all the world, you wicked little Uncle Dick, I'd shake you into jelly, I'm so savage with you! Can't you understand what a dreadful fool I shall feel when I see this brain prodigy of yours?"

"But why?"

"Why? Why, of course, he'll never look at me without remembering I've come to marry him!"

"No, no; he won't think anything of the kind. His mind is just choke full of anæsthetic experiments. He's forgotten all about you—I'm sure he has."

She laughed deliciously; pinching his old cheek and shaking him well.

"Uncle Dick! What a blunder you must have made of your love affairs!"

Robina came to see her that afternoon. The little woman advanced shyly as the tall, fashionably-dressed girl entered the room; nor did the conventional handshake put her more at ease.

"I am afraid you will find this place rather dull, Miss Seldon, after your gaieties in London," she said.

"I want to," Winifred answered; her glance softening as she took Robina in. "I've been longing to visit Uncle Dick ever since he settled here, for that reason. A dull place is so exciting."

"Dear me! I didn't know that—that sort of thing was real. I've read it in books and always thought it unnatural; but then I've never lived in London."

"You are very fortunate."

"Do you think so? Sometimes I think not. One is apt to stagnate in the country. And it must be so delightful to attend those May Meetings at Exeter Hall."

"I'm afraid I've never been to any," Winifred answered respectfully.

"What a pity! But I suppose you have no time with your social duties."

"They are vampirish, certainly. But one gets into the habit of thinking one has no time for anything. Uncle Dick says you do the work of five or six women, and I expect you have always time to spare."

"No; I'm a dreadful grumbler some days, because I can't make the hours longer. You see this is such a straggly parish; so much time is spent tramping."

"You should ride a bicycle. But perhaps you disapprove?"

"Not exactly," Robina hesitated. "Do you ride one yourself?"

"Of course. You are forced to do so in town if you are unfortunate enough to be between the age of seven or seventy. But I simply loathe it."

"Do you think they will ever be cheaper?"

A sudden understanding flashed through Winifred's mind.

"You mean to say you'd like one and can't afford to buy one? Do forgive my rudeness! I can't imagine what it must be like to want something you can't get!"

Robina looked amazed again.

"Would you like to be poor?"

"Yes. I hate money. I detest luxury. It is all absolute slavery."

"How you will agree with Mr. Knightley! I never saw such a contented man. And I suppose, if he weren't so charitable, he would be quite rich, only he'll never push forward and make the stand he might."

Winifred did not answer. She did not want to own that idea of him appealed to her. She gave her visitor some tea and turned the conversation. And then Robina got up.

"I hope you'll come and see me soon?"

"I'll come to-morrow, if I may."

Robina beamed.

"Do! Mr. Knightley has promised to have tea with me, and you will help to entertain him, won't you?"

There was no drawing back; but when she was alone Winifred began to consider she would be pretty well choked with the man. He was to dine with them that evening, and evidently the contiguity plan would be put in full force.

She dressed early, and was amusing herself strumming the piano when Knightley was announced. She gazed at him critically as he came down the long drawing-room. He was a rather tall, square-built man, with a massive head and strong, penetrating dark eyes, and a very noble face.

For the first time in her life Winifred's self-possession left her somewhat, and she said shyly, as she shook hands—

"I don't know if you've heard my name. I am Winifred Seldon."

"I hope I shall not forget," he answered abruptly. "I've an unpardonable habit of letting names slip me. Faces never do. And I have met you before."

"I think not."

"Yes, I have," he answered decisively.

She sat down, trying to evade his scrutiny; but he remained standing, staring at her.

"It was at *table d'hôte* in Switzerland somewhere, last summer. I sat opposite to you, and I remember remarking you had the largest, coldest hand for a woman I had ever seen."

He was staring now at her large, shapely white hands; and she laughed.

"You are as polite as the Chinaman who told an English lady what he admired about her most were her big feet. But you may be right—I was in Switzerland last year."

"There is always so much character in a hand," he said, not listening to her. "One can gather a great deal at the first glance. Whereas the face only expresses what the owner chooses."

Nevertheless, his eyes rested again on her beautiful countenance. His scrutiny made her nervous, and she began to resent it.

"Have you put the vegetables to sleep?" she asked in her studiously polite voice. "Uncle tells me you are doing wonderful things with anæsthetics."

"Oh, mere experiments. When a discoverer gives you his secret, you always want to go 'one better.'"

"I shouldn't. Discoveries always bore me. I prefer things to go on as they are."

"Suffering among them?"

"Too much is done to prolong life. It was better in the old days, when the weak ones were left to die off."

"Do you mean that?"

"It is only merciful. Crowds of people pray to die——"

"And science is answering the prayer—too slowly it is true, but surely. People never want to end life, they merely want to escape pain."

"And I want to escape thinking. So please talk about something else. Do you like Miss Tulloch?"

"Robina? Of course I do; I love her!"

"She has tiny hands."

"The softest, kindest little hands ever made—the hands of an angel."

"Who's that? Robina? So she is! so she is!" Dr. Haynes called out as he entered the room. "Who doubts it?"

"Not I, Uncle Dick. She made me feel that I was the world, the flesh and the devil rolled into one," Winifred laughed.

"Don't be profane, my dear," rebuked her uncle, laughing too.

She kept up a flippancy chatter through dinner, to which Knightley

responded with quiet sarcasm, and Dr. Haynes rubbed his hands in ecstasy. His Winnie was so clever! Quite a match for Knightley's genius; he shouldn't be surprised to hear him propose any minute! And how rapt the young man sat when Winnie played to him later on! She certainly was a masterful pianist; her strong white hands struck her chords clearly and powerfully with a delightful crispness. But Dr. Haynes was nodding asleep when Knightley suddenly went up to her and said—

"Anything but Mendelssohn, please. You play marvellously; but you have no soul; you never shed a tear in your life, and Mendelssohn is always weeping."

She got up and shut the piano. "You know an astonishing amount about me," she said angrily. "It is a pity I haven't had the advantage of your analysis before. Wake up, Uncle Dick! Mr. Knightley is waiting for billiards."

"Good night," she added, turning to him. "I am afraid we find each other a little antipathetic."

They got on no better at Robina's tea the next day. The good little woman did her best to wave the olive-branch, but even her sweet influences failed to make the peace. Knightley did not stay long, obviously leaving to avoid walking back with Winifred.

"As if I should have given him the chance," she said to Robina indignantly. "I can't think how you can like him, Miss Tulloch."

"I know how good he is," Robina answered quietly. "I have known him trudge miles to sit up all night with a cottager's child, and go without a great-coat to buy an old woman a donkey-cart. It's just in these little things one learns to know the whole person; and I don't think there is anyone I respect more."

"A pity his manners belie him."

And the consequential Winifred, who had held her court of adorers in London, went home piqued and angry.

Two or three days later Knightley was standing at his window and saw her running along, holding Robina on a bicycle. It was a hot August afternoon, and it must have been hot work, but she passed backwards and forwards with untiring energy, and Robina's face was a delight to look on.

The next afternoon he was walking home from one of his rounds, and turning a corner sharply he was just in time to see Winifred dash in front of the London coach and snatch up a small dog from the middle of the road. It was a blind mongrel belonging to a cottager, and she carried the poor muddy little thing up the hill as tenderly as if it had been a babe.

"Curious," he said to himself, not attempting to overtake her. "Her natural pluck, of course, prompted her to save the poor beast; but I shouldn't have expected anything further."

Another surprise was in store for him. He dined with her uncle two or three times a week, and Knightley always found her brilliantly

flippant, and he grew gruffly sarcastic. She never played to him, nor did he ask her; but one evening, coming from the billiard room, he met the sweet, pathetic strains of the first of Mendelssohn's Lieder stealing down the passages, and at the drawing-room door he stopped to listen. Suddenly the music ceased, and he turned the handle gently and went in. To his astonishment, Winifred's proud head was bowed on the keys and she was sobbing as if her heart would break. A strange emotion seized him and he started to go to her; but the remembrance of her dislike of him checked him, and he left the room, closing the door noiselessly.

Winifred was an enigma to herself. When the paroxysm was over she sprang to her feet and paced excitedly up and down the room. What on earth was happening to her? Tom Knightley had been quite right when he said she had never shed a tear in her life. It was a literal fact. She never remembered doing such a thing before. She couldn't understand what had unnerved her. She had felt absurdly unlike herself the whole day. In fact, ever since she came, she had experienced new emotions. When she disliked people, as a rule, she dismissed the thought of them with indifference; but Tom Knightley worried her at every turn. She cordially hated him; but she could never rest till she knew his opinion on every subject. Then, that look of pleasure on Robina's face when she presented her with the bicycle; it was the first approach to real joy she, Winifred, had ever known. She had given liberally all her life, it wasn't that, but she had never felt she had any share in the gift before. And, lastly, that very morning she had met Robina on Tom Knightley's arm. He was talking to her with such a wonderful tenderness on his face, it set Winifred wondering, with an uncomfortable yearning, what it must be like *to be loved*.

She heard her uncle's step in the hall, and she hastily blew out the candles and went to bid him good night.

II.

It was rumoured in the little village that Tom Knightley had taken a house. What could be the meaning of it? Not even his landlady knew; she could only shake her head tearfully to the many questioners. It would be so hard to lose him; he'd been the nicest lodger she'd ever done with, but of course it was natural such a nice gentleman should get married in the end.

"Married!" Dr. Haynes roared, when the report reached him. "Who on earth is he going to marry?"

Winifred shrugged her shoulders with a yawn; but the large white hand that held her book trembled.

"I'm afraid I sha'n't be here to the wedding, Uncle Dick; I really must be returning home."

"Not really, Winnie? Well, well; it doesn't do to go match-making at my age. I'm a sad old bungler."

"Dear old thing! What nonsense you talk!" She threw her book down and went and knelt by his side. "It isn't your fault two people can't get on."

"But why can't you?" he broke in, stroking her fair hair, and wondering at the half-wistful look in her face. "What is the matter with Tom that you don't like him? He isn't particularly handsome——"

"No; but his face—there's something in it that's better than mere good looks."

"And his manners are very roughish."

"Not to Robina, or to little children. Oh, Uncle Dick, you should see the sweet things fly after him down the hill, and empty his pockets and climb into his arms."

"And then he's wrapped up in his scientific pursuits."

"But aren't they divine! I believe he'd give years of his life to stem the tide of disease."

"And—ah, well, he's chosen another wife!"

Dr. Haynes pulled the girl's head on his breast, and there was the oddest twinkle in his eyes as he rocked her in his arms.

And then a strange thing happened. Winifred was arranging the flowers one morning, when Tom Knightley was announced. "I've come to ask you a favour," he said, in his abrupt way, dropping her hand quickly, as if it burnt him. "I want you to help me furnish my house."

"*Me?* You want *me*? Why don't you ask Robina?"

"I have; but she declares you'd do it so much better. Says you've got more taste, and know best what fashionable ladies like."

Winifred walked to the other end of the room to set a vase down, and the hot flush died before she faced him again.

"I shall be very pleased to do anything for you."

"Thank you. The fact is, Miss Seldon—as I daresay you've heard—I want to get married. Do you think I'm a fool?"

"It depends on the woman you choose, I suppose," she laughed nervously.

"She's a witch," he answered grimly. "That's why I hope it will come off. She interferes with everything. I can't get away from her; I can't think of anything else. But there is a huge difficulty in the way—it was Robina's idea about the house. She is so practical, you know; she declared it was the first step. But when I began to consider the papering and furnishing, and all that, I had an attack of vertigo, and if you don't come to my assistance the whole thing will fall to pieces."

So they chose the wall-paper together. They made two or three journeys to town, and at last the house was finished.

"But why you asked me to help you has been an absurdity," she

said to him, as they took a look round the pretty drawing-room for the last time ; and she walked to the window to gaze at the enchanting view across the valley. "Your taste in everything is infinitely more artistic than mine."

"And you think she will be satisfied?" he asked nervously.

"If your case depends on that point I shouldn't think you need fear."

"May I tell you a little more? You have been so wonderfully kind, I feel I may presume. . . . The dreadful part is—she *dislikes* me!"

Winifred turned and looked at him with gentle compassion.

"Oh, is she some cold society person? You spoke of her as a fashionable lady."

"That has been her life," he said.

"Perhaps she will find this place humanising. It has had that effect on me. I never dreamed I could feel so happy or—or—so profoundly miserable."

"*You?*" He saw the droop of the proud mouth, and the blue eyes growing misty. "Why are you miserable?"

She bit her lip, and two large tears fell slowly down her cheeks.

"I have wanted you to like me a little," she said humbly.

"Winifred! Look at me!" The two white hands were trembling in his. "My dear, my dear! I thought it would be so hard to win you. You disliked me so much. Can you forgive my cowardice?"

She turned her face from him, and tried to withdraw her hands.

"No," he said fiercely, "you shall not go till you have answered me. If you won't come to me, if you won't share my life and all my hopes and prayers, existence will be an empty nothingness to me."

"I?" The strange, wild joy was suffocating her. "Oh, why haven't you understood how I have loved you? Have I seemed such a cold thing all the time?"

He pressed her hands to his lips.

"No," he said. "These have grown so inexpressibly tender ; but I couldn't dare think it was for me!"

LILIAN STREET.



MY LADY MOON



BY LADY MARGARET MAJENDIE.

CHAPTER X.

A FEW minutes later Ralph Stourton led Nell Miles down into the hall. It was very dark, and the girl sank shivering with cold and fatigue on to a chair.

Lady Stourton had motioned them to leave her with so imperious and despairing a gesture that they could do nought but obey her. Ralph looked at the great clock.

"It is ten minutes past six," he said drearily. "My father must have passed away on the stroke of six."

"I would I had not been too late," said Nell, trying to hide the large tears that were rolling down her cheeks. "I had so counted on winning him back to life, and so drawing thy mother's heart to mine."

"My poor mother," said Ralph mournfully. "Dear Nell, could I but bestow you for a short time with my cousin Isobel, I would go back to her."

"Heed me not," she said, bravely. "Let me but sit here and rest a little while, for I must go home to-night. Mine own dear mother is sorely ill, and alas! it was God's will that here I should do no good. Go, then, sweetheart; let me not keep you from your mother in her need."

He kissed her hand, placed her on the settle with large cushions on it, the most comfortable seat in the room, and went rapidly away.

Nell lay back, weary with the long rapid ride and sick at heart. She could no longer check her tears.

Some time passed, and she was aroused by the sound of approaching women's voices, and two servants entered with a lamp.

"Truly," one was saying, "I am afraid lest the witch should serve me as she served Mistress Isobel! Didst ever see so violent a fit?"

"Ay, Janet, I have seen her as bad before; it is not altogether a

new thing," said a staid, older voice. "And mark you, girl, Sir Michael himself strove might and main to curb evil-speaking. So must thou be more careful—— Ah!"

She perceived Nell Miles and advanced, while the foolish Janet uttered a shrill little cry and ran away.

Nell looked up at the prim face of the housekeeper with wide-opened eyes. "Alas," she said, "I would have done my best to save your lord, but they sent to us too late."

"I myself," said the woman, "have little faith in quackeries when the leech himself has given up all hope. But, young mistress, no blame to you, for doubtless you wished him well. It is unfortunate about Mistress Isobel, is it not?"

"I know nothing. Was it she who was taken ill when I arrived?"

"Ay; she has been seized with strange contortions, laughing and weeping and struggling much. And she cries that some unholy spell has been cast upon her, and that she cannot overget its influence."

"Would she see me?" said Nell timidly. "I know a medicine that would drive the ill away."

"The best remedy would be to see you, in sooth," said the housekeeper warmly. "Then would she see her folly." And the good woman muttered to herself, "Truly, never saw I a more modest maiden."

"I would do my very utmost for any in this house," said Nell, sorrowfully.

At this moment Janet came back.

"Mistress Isobel hath sent me to fetch you, maiden," she said. "Prithee come to her softly, for her poor head is racked with pain."

Nell rose to her feet. She felt as if there were something strangely wanting in consideration and proper courtesy in the method in which she was summoned to Isobel's presence; but she was too gentle and far too weary to care much. "I will come," she said.

She followed the girl up a narrow winding stair, through a long gallery hung with portraits and rich needlework draperies until they arrived at a closed door. Here Janet stopped and spoke to her.

"Wait here," she said, "and I will find out whether my young lady is ready to receive you." And she went in, closing the door behind her.

Nell waited several minutes. She sat down on one of the quaintly-carved oak chairs, and her eyes took in all the beautiful and costly things the gallery contained. The colouring was singularly harmonious, and although it was dimly lighted, yet the lamps burning in silver vessels, wicks floating in perfumed oil, shed a soft and lovely light which made all very beautiful.

After awhile Nell grew impatient. She had left her mother ill, sent forth by that mother's own strong urging to carry help to the dying man, and she had gone willingly with her young lover at her

side ; but now that her work of mercy was fulfilled, a strong yearning took possession of her to get back to her mother—a kind of thrill of fear and misgiving lest she, that beloved mother, should be worse and perchance needing her only child.

She had left Father Johnstone in the house, and old Rachel, whose devotion was absolute. Nell felt lonely and helpless in this great strange house now that Ralph was no longer with her, and she determined, when she had seen Isobel, to ask for a horse and go home, with or without escort. She could no longer stay away.

At last the door opened, and Janet, with an affectation of extreme caution, beckoned her to come in. "Speak softly," she said, preceding her into the room.

"You can go, Janet ; I wish to be alone with this lady," said an imperious voice.

"Is it well ? Is it safe, my lady ?" said the officious waiting-woman ; but the voice repeated "Go," and she was forced to obey.

Nell found herself in a large bedchamber, more gorgeously furnished than any she had ever beheld before. The bed was draped with yellow damask and richly carved. On a couch by the fire, covered with great pillows and costly shawls, lay Isobel. Her long black hair fell in great plaits to the ground, and she wore a loose robe of embroidered silk, which fell round her ungirdled, revealing fine snowy lawn and laces.

"Come hither !" she said, pointing to a stool by her side. "Come and sit here, maiden. I wish to talk with you."

Nell obeyed, and for a moment Isobel's bold black eyes stared at her with a look of close scrutiny. Instead of the wild beauty she had expected, she saw a pure, delicately moulded oval face, very fair, and at the moment colourless, with wonderfully clear grey eyes fringed with long dark lashes. The dress, white as driven snow, drawn up round the soft little throat, with a small ruff of closely-pleated lace. Her modest, pointed coif was edged with large oriental pearls, beneath which little locks and tendrils of the soft fair hair strayed on her brow. She had left below in the hall the great black riding-cloak with a projecting hood she had worn riding through the forest.

Isobel turned away her eyes with a sigh that was almost a groan.

"So the vain quest has failed," she said. "And I hear that as thy foot did cross the threshold my uncle died !"

"I grieve that I came too late," said Nell, softly.

"And I am glad. Thou mightest have done him some cruel harm with thy quackeries."

Nell did not speak, but the colour rushed into her face.

"Speak, girl !" cried Isobel, harshly. "What glamour didst thou and thy strange mother cast over Ralph Stourton that he came not home, but left his dying father calling on him night and day in vain ?"

"When the message came he sped without one moment's delay," said Nell quietly.

"But he had been with you many days! What did he find to do in those dark swamps of which men say such evil things? What spell did ye cast over him?"

"I understand not your meaning," said Nell with grave dignity.

"Bandy not words with me! Tell me the truth!"

"I have naught to say," said Nell. "When a sick man comes to our door, we send him not away unhealed."

"Pshaw!" cried Isabel. "The leeches say the wounds are ill-healed, and would fain have opened them again and fired them."

Nell gave a little low laugh.

"Why laugh? I tell you the truth."

"Yet did not your cousin submit to such treatment, did he?"

"That concerns you not. Your work here is altogether at an end, and a failure, girl!"

"And mine own desire is to go home," said Nell, rising to her feet. "And all I ask of your scant courtesy is the means of doing so."

"They shall not lack," cried Isabel. "Janet!" At her call the maid came in from the gallery. "Go, Janet, at once, tell Joe to saddle the brown mare—Bess—for this maiden's use, and then conduct her to the door."

Janet went away quickly.

"You shall have your wish," said Isabel.

Nell sat still waiting, a choking feeling in her throat; this strange, unkind treatment had come on her with a shock.

To others it might have seemed a terrible ordeal to ride home through the darkness of the coming night by that lonely forest track, but she feared not that; her longing to be once more with her mother grew ever more and more strong; but that she should meet with this harsh treatment in her young lover's home and from his kindred, struck her with such pain that only the strong sense of outraged pride forced back the stinging tears from her eyes.

"How long will it take you to ride home?" said Isabel suddenly.

"Less than three hours."

"Did you take that much time in coming hither?"

"No, but it was daylight, and I was not alone."

"Ah! but folk say that you are often seen at night alone, and that shadows and moonlight and the horrors of the forest are nothing to you, for that you have strange guides."

"I fear not Nature," said Nellie gently, "and my guides are the angels of Nature's God."

"Ah, blaspheme not!" cried Isabel with a violent shudder. "That were indeed too much."

"Poor maiden," said Nell tenderly. "Surely you are over-wrought and ill, or you would not speak to me thus wildly. Is it the loss you have been called upon to bear that makes your spirit thus sore? Doubtless you loved your uncle well?"

"He was a father to me!" cried Isobel. The tender tone of her companion's voice touched some chord in her proud heart, for she burst into stormy tears.

"Doubtless it is that," said Nell, "and tears will do you good."

She laid her soft little hand on Isobel's, but the girl threw it off violently.

"Touch me not!" she cried. "Oh, what evil fate hath sent you across my path!"

Then a cold fear seemed to seize on Nell; she thought it must be madness that would treat her like this.

"I beseech you," she said, "speak not so roughly to me. I am a young girl like yourself, and I am lonely in this place."

"Then why did you come?" cried Isobel fiercely. "Save to breed misery and dissension among us."

Nell looked at her earnestly, and her large grey eyes flashed and dilated.

"You do not know what you are saying," she said. "My errand here was one of mercy and healing."

"Yet as you crossed the threshold of his room my uncle died!"

Nell looked at her still, then spoke low and earnestly. "God forgive you those wicked words, and defend you from the evil spirit who whispered them to you. I will not stay another moment here."

Isobel caught at her gown as she rose.

"You shall not leave me like this," she cried. "You shall hear me out."

But Nell had drawn her white gown away and went out into the gallery without.

She sat down shivering, not daring to go further in this strange, great house, and the large tears rolled down her cheeks.

After a few moments Janet came hurriedly back exclaiming, "Ah, you are here then, maiden? The brown mare is ready, and I have fetched your riding cloak to the kitchen door."

Nell made no remonstrance, such was her longing to be gone, and on her way back to her own mother. She followed the girl swiftly. Janet conducted her through long stone passages and across the great kitchens, where the kitchen people paused in their work to stare stupidly at her as she passed, then out into the courtyard.

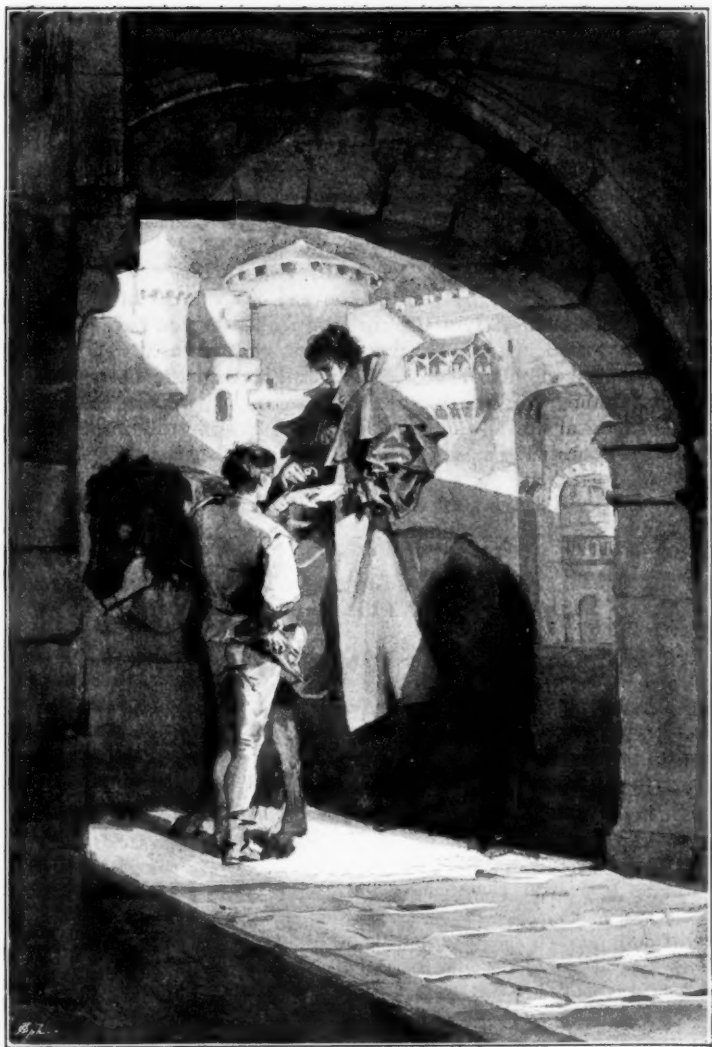
Here stood Joe, stubborn Joe as they called him, with the big brown mare saddled for a woman to ride.

When the man saw the white slender figure and beautiful face of fair Nell, involuntarily he drew off his cap and bowed.

"The mare is quiet enough, mistress," he said, and Nell smiled back and said, "I am not afraid."

Janet almost threw at her the long riding-cloak with many capes and a hood in which she rode, and then the girl, with an unceremonious "good-night," fled back to her mistress.

Nell drew on her cloak, but the hood stifled her, and she flung it



"WHAT AILS THY HAND, MY FRIEND?" SHE SAID, GENTLY.

back. It was a cold, clear, starlit evening, already dark at eight o'clock.

The groom raised her to the saddle ; as he did so he uttered an exclamation of pain, and Nell saw that his hand was roughly bound with a piece of sacking.

"What ails thy hand, my friend?" she said gently. "Thou seemest to me in pain."

"Ay, pain enough," he answered. "It is a sore evil that hath gathered in it. I showed it to Master Gurdon, the leech from Baignton who has been here so often for my poor lord (God rest his soul), and he bade me hold it for five minutes before the fire and then keep it from the air, but it grows even worse."

"Wilt let me see it?" said Nell gently.

"Ay, that will I, for by Heaven above I do think you to be a sweet and godly lady," said the man. "Folks say you have gifts of healing, and the leech told me that this was a grave case."

Nell jumped off her horse. He took her into the open outer kitchen, through the thick stone arches of which she saw the scullions hard at work. There was a lighted torch in the ring on the wall, and beneath its light he unfastened the rough bandage and showed his hand.

Nell saw at a glance what was wrong.

"My friend," she said kindly, "I cannot heal thee without pain. Wilt trust me?"

The rough fellow had fallen under the spell of her sweet gentleness.

"That will I, mistress, and all the more that you warn me of the pain beforehand."

Nell took from the satchel that hung at her girdle the little instrument she wanted. The poor fellow bore the sharp pain well, and even smiled when she showed him that she had drawn from the wound a sharp splinter of wood.

"See, this has been thine enemy," she said. "It was driven in very deeply, but now the pain will soon be over."

She bound up the wound in soft lint, and an ointment cool and fresh as the touch of cream, and over it she replaced the sacking.

"That was a rough covering," she said. "All will soon be healed now, and I must go. Loosen not the bandage till all heat and pain be entirely past. Be patient for some days. See, I leave this little pot of ointment with thee; doubtless someone will bandage it afresh for thee in, say, a week's time. Now of thy kindness, help me to go. Nay, but thou shalt not use thy hand. Let me mount from the horse-block, friend."

Nell mounted the tall brown mare and turned her head towards the forest. Joe had given her a lantern, and as she rode away she found that the rough fellow was kissing the hem of her cloak, and almost sobbing as he cried, "I am her friend and servant for life, so help me St. Joseph, mine own patron saint!"

CHAPTER XL.

It was very dark in the forest road, so dark that anyone not so attuned to every aspect of fair nature as the maiden was, would have been much afraid. The brown mare winced, and went along with ears pointed, and many a foolish shy.

When it grew too dark even to see the sky above the trees, Nell lighted her lantern, and the strange lights and shadows that it threw startled the birds and rabbits and hares, so that swift scurrying sounds frightened the brown mare more than ever.

Nell rode slowly on, and her thoughts were very sad. All had been so sad and painful a surprise. It even seemed to her for one moment that her own Ralph had neglected and forgotten her; but that thought passed as quickly as it dawned. He had deemed her quietly and securely resting where he had placed her, and had been forced to be with his mother in the extremity of the greatest need that can fall on mortal here below. He had been so tender and so courteous to her all the time, Nell knew; he had scarcely known how to express the depth of his gratitude to her for having come to the Castle and striven to save his beloved father. Nell thought with a pang of terror of the strong force that her mother had put on her to make her go—that mother stricken with some illness which she had not had time to analyse. As that thought crossed her she urged her horse till it broke into a heavy unwilling trot. The road seemed endless, more especially as the brown mare, a slow and fat beast, soon gave up trotting and would not be urged into better speed.

Nell became very weary, so weary that it seemed as if her eyes must close, and she must fall asleep even in the saddle. She had been many long hours on horseback that day.

She fought hard against the growing weakness, fought till she could hold out no longer. The reins fell on the brown mare's neck, her large eyes closed, and her slight figure swayed and bowed with every movement of her beast.

Suddenly she was aroused by the sound of galloping hoofs behind her—roused so suddenly that she started into wakefulness, and had to clutch reins and mane not to be thrown from her saddle. Someone was in hot pursuit of her, someone riding at a pace that could not be otherwise than dangerous in that dark overhung track. The sound came nearer, and with an exclamation of loud relief Ralph Stourton reined up at her side.

"My Nell! my love!" he exclaimed. "Thank God that I have found you, and that you are safe. The dastards! to let you leave the house alone and unattended. The discourteous cowards! Everyone of them shall smart for this."

"No, no!" cried Nell, now wide awake and full of the bright joy

and comfort that his presence and his thought for her brought to her. "No, it was not their fault! I was seized with a longing, Ralph—a great longing to get back to my mother. You know she was ill when I left her."

"And I—I left you too long! Pardon me, my own little Nell."

"I would not have had you leave your mother, Ralph, not for the whole world. And now, sweetheart, prithee come no further, but go back to her."

"Nay," said Ralph, very sadly. "I can do no more for her just now. She, with her women, hath fulfilled the last sad duties; and now, worn and faint, they carried her to bed. I stole thither for a last look, and found that she had fallen into the deep sleep of one exhausted by long watching. It is well with her."

"And mistress Isobel?"

"What of her? She hath not left her chamber to-day. Why did you not ask for her, Nell? She would have arranged that you should be fitly attended, even if you could not wait for me."

Nell looked at him wonderingly. "I was not afraid," she said; and in her gentle heart she resolved to tell him nothing of the behaviour of his cousin Isobel.

"It is not fitting," he repeated, still chafed and angered by the neglect. "No guest in our house was ever so scurvily treated."

"I doubt sometimes whether I am fit to be a guest in your father's house," said Nell dreamily. "I have learnt new things of late."

"Nay," cried Ralph, his arm round her slender waist, his head bent down to her. "Nay, my own sweet one, guest shall you be never again—but wife, mistress, queen of my lands, my home, and my life."

Still her fair head drooped.

"It behoves you to consider well," she said. "I myself perchance may feel that I, and I best, could make you blest and happy; but there are others, your mother, the cousin who has been more than a sister. I am no great lady, Ralph. I am a very simple maid, and have no merit save that conferred on me by yourself, my lord."

"And that?" said Ralph, bending so that her fair head touched his shoulder.

"Your love," she whispered.

For a moment he did not speak, only pressed her to him more tenderly.

"Is not that enough?" he said at length. "Enough to satisfy your scruples? And, for myself, my Nell, in all the world none can ever be to me so good, so noble, or so worthy, or, sweet one, so dear!"

They rode on silently after this, and it needed all his skill to guide the horses. Once more fatigue was out-mastering her, though with it came a comforting sense of help and strength and protection. His strong arm supported her, his right hand held the double reins,

and they went slowly on, cautiously, till the trees grew more sparsely, the sky became lighter, and they emerged from the forest at the very door of home.

"We are arrived," he said, lifting her weary form from her horse. "Now, my sweet Nell, you must in very truth repose. You are very weary. Go in, dear, and I will take the horses round and give them a feed of corn, for in an hour's time I must go home again."

"So soon, Ralph?"

"Yes. I must be at home when my mother wakes again to her sore grief. See, that is strange! The great door is unfastened. Go in, Nell, and I will be with you as swiftly as I can."

He turned away with the horses, and Nell went indoors stiff and spent with fatigue. She threw off her great cloak and crossed the hall. The logs were smouldering sullenly. She stirred them to a blaze so that their light might guide her betrothed when he should follow her. Then softly, dreading to rouse her mother if by good fortune she were sleeping, she stole into that mother's room.

It was not dark here. Nell stood for a moment on the threshold, her hands raised to her eyes as if she would fain clear their vision. At the head of the long, low bed, and again at its foot were burning four tall wax candles, and on the bed itself she saw her mother lying. Nell went forward, rapidly pushing aside her hair, still clearing her vision, which seemed to be playing her such strange untoward tricks.

"Mother!" she said falteringly.

Was that indeed her mother—the mother whom she loved so passionately? This long still rigid form. Annora lay locked in a stern infinite peace. The white face carved in lines like chiselled stone, so cold, so delicate; her long black gown was composed in straight unbroken folds. The white veil that encircled the sharply-defined head hung in flat, broken folds on the rigid shoulders and from thence under the stiff straight arms, so that the waxen hands rested on it, and on the still breast was placed a silver crucifix.

"Mother!" cried Nell, and the voice was the cry of a lost child seeking for what she could not find.

From a distant corner of the room, in shadow which the concentrated candle-light could not penetrate, rose a long dark figure from his knees, and Father Johnstone came forward. His face was ashen white as with quivering lips he strove to speak calmly.

"Nell, my poor little Nell!" he said.

But she never even glanced at him. She shrank back against the wall, her clenched hands on her breast—she was wild with terror. That terrible stony figure was not, could not be her loving mother.

"My poor child!" he said, speaking with difficulty. "Poor motherless child! God has taken her home. We must not grudge her that unutterable peace."

Nell put out her hands blindly, pitifully.

"Father," she cried, "what does it mean? Oh, tell me what it means? Is she dead?"

"My poor child!"

"Is it true? Is she dead?"

"It is true," he said, very tenderly. "I did not expect you home to-night, or I would have met and warned you, my poor child!"

"When? How long? Tell me!" she gasped.

"She had been ill all through the day, and at five o'clock Rachel fetched me to her bedside, telling me that she was going."

"Go on!" cried Nell in a tone of anguish.

"She lay breathing so softly that we bent down to see that she yet lived, and I recited prayers till suddenly she cried aloud, 'He is calling—calling—and I must go! The queen's messenger has come!' Then again after a pause, 'Do what one will, say what one may, the queen's command is law! I come! I come!' Then for a while she was silent while I prayed that the blessed saints would have her in their keeping and await around her bed. She spoke once more, 'I promised, and I come!' God only knows to whom she spoke, or whether in the unseen world some old tryst was in her worn-out brain, poor Annora. The end came very soon, and as the last sigh left her lips it was upon the stroke of the sixth hour."

Nell threw herself upon her knees.

"Oh, mother, mother!" she cried. "Oh, mother, why did you go without one thought of me?"

While she spoke Ralph Stourton, drawn by vague fear and the sound of their voices to the chamber of death, came in.

Nell rose to her feet with a wild ringing cry:

"Ralph, Ralph! She is dead!"

He caught her in his arms as she swayed forward and fell insensible.

CHAPTER XII.

THEY called the old servant Rachel, who, worn out with bitter weeping, had lain down for a short rest, and together they carried the senseless form of poor Nell to her chamber and laid her on her bed, leaving her to the tender care of the old nurse.

The two men came back together to the hall, and then all the secrets of their lives were put aside and they spoke openly.

"So Mistress Annora was your sister, father?" said Ralph earnestly. "And was the once beautiful Nan Johnstone of whom my father once spoke to me?"

"What did he say of her?" said the priest, raising his dark, care-worn face.

"Enough to show me that he held her dear. But why all this mystery and concealment, father? Is it indeed so necessary?"

"For the sake of mine own poor life, no—for that of my scattered, faithful people, yes. Until I returned again, a recusant under the ban of the law, my life forfeit to the crown, children died unbaptised, men and women lived unwedded and died unreconciled with Heaven. Say, was it not worth while?"

Ralph bowed his head.

"If it be so, you are right," he said. "But the risk for these gentle ladies has been too great."

A frown gathered on Father Johnstone's brow.

"It was an accident at first," he said, "which led to the wild tales about Kettering Mere, and the place is mysterious and dangerous. It needs not much imagination to conjure up magic tales, and my poor sister, in her zeal, saw in them protection for our secret meetings."

"And you permitted it?" said Ralph, sternly.

"No. When I found out the truth I was angry, so angry that I spoke harshly to her. Heaven rest her soul, but it was too late! It is a mischief very hard to undo."

"Yet will I do it!" cried Ralph. "My arm is strong enough to protect and defend my wife."

"She is not your wife," said Father Johnstone, slowly. "I doubt not your power, young sir; but a young man's loud boisterous defence of an utterly lonely and very beautiful maiden has small weight in the great unkind world."

"That must be remedied," said Ralph, forcibly. "Say, father, what should hinder our marriage? Can you not marry us yourself in secret, for fear of an outcry from my kinsfolk which might cause her pain, but securely and so legally that I may have my marriage-lines to show when I bring home the fairest bride that ever crossed the threshold of my father's house?"

"Aye, it could be done; but——"

"No 'buts,' father! See, when Nell is once proclaimed my wife, once established at the Castle, who would dare breathe one word of evil?"

"You speak impetuously, sir; but it shall never be said that this scheme was urged or advised by me!"

"It never shall be said! Mine be the full responsibility, father. And how to fulfil the law?"

"There needs but a priest. I can fill all its needs. For witnesses, old Rachel and one other will suffice. Have you not one faithful Catholic among your servants?"

"If so, they worship in secret—remember the penalty. You must provide one of your own flock."

Father Johnstone bowed his head.

"Young sir," he said, "you have well weighed the cost?"

"Yes, and weighted with my love and hope the scale kicks the beam!"

"Sir Ralph"—the priest spoke slowly and with hesitation—"when I place this young fair bride in your keeping, you will think of those of her own faith, persecuted and worshipping in secret, and if you cannot protect us you will ignore us mercifully."

"All I can do to protect the liberty of your worship I will do, father. That I can promise you."

"And you are strong enough to quench evil-speaking about this poor orphan maid?"

"She will be my wife," he answered haughtily. In his young self-confidence he believed himself to be all-powerful.

Father Johnstone sank back in his chair. The strong face quivered a little, and he rubbed his hands, for they were cold.

"All will be well, with God's help," he said, "and your home will be a safe shelter for my sister's child. Poor Annora, she erred in judgment, trusting to the old wild plan of playing with the superstition of the world; but, if she erred, she suffered bitterly. God rest her poor weary spirit!"

"And now," said Ralph, rising to his feet and buckling on his light riding sword, "I must begone. I must be home before dawn—before my mother wakes—and it may be some days before I can return hither, for the days of mourning must be kept after we lay my dear father to rest. When they are over I will come again, and, father, you will be ready with the papers and the witnesses, so that at once, the very day I come, you can make Nell mine own. What say you to this day fortnight, the 2nd of November?"

"All Souls' Day?" said Father Johnstone mournfully. "Nay, that day we must consecrate to the holy dead."

"Then the following day, father? Shall it be so?"

"So be it. Now must you start, my friend. Stay, will you not eat a mouthful first? You look very worn and pale."

Ralph Stourton brushed away two tears which suddenly started to his eyes.

"I loved my father," he said, brokenly.

Father Johnstone brought out wine and a loaf of bread. He had turned aside his own face to hide it. He also had loved the dead man—loved him as dearly as a brother. The shades of old days were about him to-night, his old friend's clear ringing voice, hearty and full of life and strength, before the service of the rival queens drove them all asunder. Annora, young and enthusiastic, with her fair hair and large grey eyes. Eulalie, golden-haired, with eyes of soft blue—it seemed as if the touch of her hand lingered chillily on his own.

"Yes, I will drink wine," said Ralph, and the sound of his voice startled away the visions of the dead. "I have need of food, father," he went on sadly. "It seems as if a weary burden of cares and heavy duties lies upon me. Well, I must bear it as best I may. You will prepare Nell?"

"I will."

"It will not be long," cried Ralph, setting down the empty horn. "And that will give me both patience and courage. Father, your blessing and farewell."

The blessing faltered on the lips of the lonely man as he pressed Ralph's hand warmly. As he turned away he muttered to himself, "Aye, thank God, Michael's boy is worthy of him!"

Ralph Stourton rode home, leading the brown mare by the bridle. He found stubborn Joe waiting for him under the archway of the great courtyard.

"Welcome home, my young lord!" he said gruffly as he took the horses from him. "And, may I ask, did that sweet and gracious lady reach her home in safety?"

"Yes. She is a right sweet and gracious lady—is she not, Joe?"

"I never saw her equal!" said the man earnestly, and Ralph Stourton, well-pleased, threw him a gold piece as he strode indoors.

Lady Stourton slept late, and the sun was high in heaven ere slowly and with infinite pain she came back to the burden of life. She raised herself on her pillows and feebly called her women. They came to her with eyes red and swollen with weeping, for one and all knew that they had lost a kind friend and master. She bade them tell her son that she was awake, and beg him to come to her, and then she wrapped a woollen robe about her, and with weak fingers fastened back her abundant soft grey hair, and when Ralph at her summons came clanking into the room, she greeted him with loving outstretched arms.

"My boy," she cried. "My own most precious son. All I have of comfort in this empty world!"

He knelt beside her. "Mother," he cried, "could I but give you some comfort!"

"You give me the best of all comfort," she said lovingly. "Your young life is all for which I care to live." Then she put her hands to her head in a bewildered way, and went on: "Ralph, I am weak and dizzy, and can think of nothing clearly. Tell me, did Mistress Annora come? Did I see her?"

"Not Annora," said Ralph gently. "She, poor soul, was too ill to come; she could not leave her bed, but she sent her daughter, mother. Did you not see a wondrously fair maiden all in white?"

"Yes."

"She, that fair Nell, hath the same strange skill in leechcraft, and she would have brought healing to my dear father, but alas, she came too late."

"Too late," murmured the poor lady. "And I answered his very thoughts. I promised him that Annora would come; he yearned so for her coming. Strong men yield not life willingly. He yearned for healing. Was it not so, Ralph?"

"Yes, mother, it was so," he said, pressing her pale hand to

his lips. He did not wish to meet the hungry longing of her soft eyes.

"Why did she fail him? Tell me again."

"Mother, she failed him because the Angel Death had called her also. I did not mean to tell you this. That poor lonely child returned home last night to find herself motherless."

"What time did she die?"

Again Ralph bent his head not to meet the question in those eyes. He could not palter with truth.

"On the stroke of six."

She uttered a little moan. "She did not fail him then," she sighed. "Ralph, Ralph! tell me, was Annora Nan Johnstone?"

"Dear mother!"

"I thought so."

There was a long pause. Presently Ralph said softly: "Mother, for the sake of old days, the shadows of which are around us to-day, will you not act a mother's part to Annora's orphan child?"

"Your father loved Nan Johnstone, Ralph, in old, old days: but I thought the old love dead and gone; for five-and-twenty years I have been his loved and honoured wife. But now in death—in death!"

She could not finish, and Ralph had nothing to say. His whole heart and soul yearned to tell her of his own love, but he could find no sympathy, no touch with this longing now. Presently she raised herself and bade him leave her. She would rise, she said, and meet him in the chapel by-and-by, whither they had moved her lord.

Ralph went there, helping the silent tearful servants with their solemn work, so that by the time his mother was ready the chapel was arrayed in solemn black draperies and dim funeral tapers. In the midst, on a bier resplendent with purple hangings, embroidered with the golden stags of Stourton, lay the brave knight, in all the stalwart grandeur of one cut down while yet in the prime of life. On the marble lips a strange unearthly smile, such as the victor may wear when the fight is over.

CHAPTER XIII.

Six long months rolled away. The winter deepened into spring, and all the forest was alive with tender green and the song of birds. The spring ripened into summer and the full glory of nature in her maturity.

During those long months, Ralph Stourton had not yet told his mother that safe-hidden on the ill-omened banks of Kettering Mere lived his young wedded wife.

For a long time after her husband's death Lady Stourton lived the life of almost an invalid. She saw nobody, and remained shut in her

own apartments. Her feebleness was such that she was always lying on her couch. She wrapped herself in reserve, and never spoke, even to her son, of his father. It seemed as if the discovery on his death-bed—that she was not first with him, and had never been so—had broken her heart and taken all vitality from her.

But the warm weather came, the sun shone brilliantly, her rooms were full of flowers, and with tender affection her son drew her out of doors, and, by slow degrees, into the home life again. The seclusion once broken through, the weary woman looked back upon it with surprise at what she called her selfishness, and forthwith she began to throw herself into her son's life and active occupations.

The young knight's life was a full and very busy one. Lord of vast estates, he inherited responsibilities which extended over the greater part of the county, and he entered upon his work with a strong sense of duty.

It was to this full and busy life that for some time Isobel attributed the change she saw in her cousin, and in truth that in itself might well have accounted for it. He seemed to her to have developed from a light-hearted boy into a calm and self-reliant man. His attitude towards herself also had altered; the half-careless love-making to which she was accustomed ceased altogether; he treated her with affectionate consideration but nothing else. He was often silent and absorbed, and he looked contented and happy.

As time passed Isobel grew feverishly anxious for some change in his manner, some return to the old terms on which they had stood together. She strove to excite his admiration, she strove to flatter and even to quarrel with him; and deeply versed as she was in the knowledge of coquetry, she never was deceived; she perceived against her will, only too plainly, that her efforts were all useless, her hopes were vain, and that even if he had ever loved her, that love was now extinguished and for ever.

The sight of Nell Miles and her wonderful beauty had produced a fit of almost ungovernable jealousy in proud Isobel's breast; but, as days and weeks passed by without allusion to her, her fears subsided, and she began even to feel ashamed of her own inhospitable treatment of so gentle a guest.

Ralph Stourton's frequent absences excited neither curiosity nor suspicion, for business led him into all parts of the country, and he was always accompanied by stubborn Joe, now become his favourite groom.

In those long summer days, when day by day Isobel became more certain of the downfall of all her hopes, her temper suffered greatly. Always imperious to her servants, she now became harsh. To Lady Stourton alone she never showed any caprice. Indeed, it would have been a heart of stone which could have had an unkind thought towards one so bowed with sorrow, and yet so tender and unselfish.

The two ladies were one day seated out-of-doors under a wide-spreading and very beautiful oak-tree. Lady Stourton, in her long black gown and widow's coif, leant back in the carved marble seat, her hands crossed idly on her knee, while Isobel either sat beside her, or, as the mood seized her, paced the short velvety turf. She had a mass of gorgeous flowers in her hands which she had been twining into wreaths.

"Ralph goes very often away, Aunt Mary," she said restlessly. "I think his absences grow ever longer and more frequent."

"He has much to do," said his mother.

"Did he tell you whither he was going?"

"No."

"My maiden, Janet, tells me that he rides often through the Kettering Forest chases."

"That is hardly likely," said Lady Stourton. "For save for the chase the Kettering rides lead no whither."

"He has a passion for the forest. I wonder, I wonder——"

She paused. Lady Stourton looked up sorrowfully.

"What do you wonder, my child?" she said.

"I wonder whether he ever finds himself at the old house on the Mere that he once described to me so eloquently."

"It is not probable, seeing that the lady who wrought his cure is dead. Isobel, do not let foolish fancies govern you. A young man must be free to go his own way unfretted by too tight a rein: men brook not questioning, more especially men who are as my boy is, the very soul of honour."

"I marvel," said Isobel huskily, "that you, his mother, should be so easily content."

Lady Stourton looked at her astonished. "I trust him so entirely," she said gently.

Isobel made no reply; she bit her lips, and paced up and down the grass impatiently. After a pause her aunt went on. "Isobel, my child, one thing I fain would say. If my wishes are fulfilled, and you know what those wishes are, I would not that my boy should have a jealous or suspicious wife."

Isobel threw herself on the ground by her aunt, and laid her cheek on her lap.

"They will never be fulfilled," she cried. "Aunt Mary, I shall never be his wife," and she burst into a storm of tears and sobs.

Lady Stourton softly stroked the magnificent black hair until she grew more composed. "Now tell me, child, what you mean," she said.

"Aunt Mary, he loved me once. Tell me, did he not love me? Was it all a fancy?"

Lady Stourton was sorely troubled. "Indeed, I thought so, Isobel," she faltered.

"You thought so? Did you not know it? Said he naught about my becoming his wife?"

"I can scarcely tell, my child. Perhaps we were mistaken. We all looked on it as certain."

"Ah!" cried Isobel, with a deep groan. "Then it is true that it had no deeper root than in your wishes. Fool—fool that I was!"

"Nay, foolish child, who should know better than yourself? A woman ever knows when she is loved."

"Then I did know it!" cried the girl. "I call Heaven to witness that it was no fancy! He loved me then, and I—I have given him the whole love of my life!"

"Be calm, poor child, be calm!"

"Listen to my vow, you who are his mother! All that I can do to bring back his vanished love, that will I do; and this I swear!"

"I see no change," faltered his mother.

"What change would you see?" cried Isobel passionately. "He is ever courteous, ever kind. I hate his courtesy; I hate his kindliness—they are cold! When I thought he loved me, it was never so!"

"Dear Isobel," said Lady Stourton gravely, "this talk is too wild. If some coolness has by ill-fortune come between you, be calm and very gentle, and so by maidenly sweetness win him back. Who knows, poor child? It is possible that this feeling of yours hath shown itself overmuch in your intercourse with each other."

"I will win him back or die!" said Isobel gloomily.

"He cannot have let his love stray far from you, for you have no rival."

Isobel did not answer, but her dark eyes flashed. She raised herself and arranged her hair, while Lady Stourton tenderly aided her.

"So, now you look once more like my beauteous Isobel," she said lovingly; "and in good time, for hither comes our recreant knight."

"Do my eyes betray tears?" said Isobel quickly.

"Nay, they do but shine the more."

Ralph Stourton came out of the house and across the green sward to join them. He had taken off his hat, and a light breeze stirred his short dark hair. The deep mourning of his dress became him well. It was a very comely, handsome young fellow to whom the two women looked up in proud possession.

"You look weary, my son," said Lady Stourton gently, as he threw himself on the turf at her feet. "Have you ridden far?"

"Yes—far," he answered. "I was at St. Thomas Lavenham, and I heard rumours there which disquieted me, and I came home through Baignton to ascertain the truth."

"What rumours, Ralph?"

"About the secret Papist meetings. It was said that a recusant priest had been traced to his hiding-place—the hut of some poor turf-cutter or charcoal-burner in the forest—and that soldiers had received orders to follow and take him. I hate these narrow and

bigoted persecutors, and know well that the better mind of our gracious king condemns them as heartily as I myself, and I rode there to endeavour to stop it."

"And did you succeed?" cried Isobel eagerly.

"I was too late. The soldiers had been to the suspected house—a miserable hut inhabited by very poor folks; they found nothing. They went further and searched the house that belonged to Mistress Annora Miles in her lifetime; also, I am glad to say, in vain. It was a vile insult!"

"They must have been bold men to venture into the witch-country," said Isobel slowly.

A dark flush rose to Ralph Stourton's brow.

"They were men, not silly women!" he said shortly.

Isobel shrank as if he had struck her. Lady Stourton hastened to interpose.

"I am glad," she said falteringly, "that, in this matter also, you follow your father's strongly-expressed opinion, Ralph."

Ralph was willing to change the subject.

"I rode home through part of the forest," he said, "and most beautiful it was. I rode slowly, with the reins loose on Phœbe's neck, and I thought of my good Sultan, whose bones lie swallowed up in that awful, relentless grave, and I wished that the sleek well-fed mare had half the sense, and one-fifth of the affection of my lost favourite. Once I drew rein, and for the space of five minutes stood still as a statue, listening to the songs of the birds, the hum of bees, the rustling of the tiny breeze in the leaves which formed a thick emerald arch overhead. While I stood thus motionless, suddenly into the grass ride leaped a wondrously beautiful wild fox, his long brush trailing, his wild eyes like sparkles of topaz light, glancing fearlessly round till they saw me. He bounded away with a movement swift as light and of marvellous savage grace."

Isobel gave a curious little shiver. "The story is scarce holy!" she said. "I feel sick and faint, Aunt Mary, and by your leave I will go indoors." She gathered up her flowers and left them.

"What is wrong with Isobel, dear mother?" said Ralph, looking after her. "She often complains of these odd fancies now; and she seems to love to harp on that old foolish story that so irritated my father, till I can scarce keep my temper!"

Lady Stourton sighed.

"Be not impatient with her, dear son," she said; "she does not look well or happy. This life, doubtless, is very dull for a young maiden in the full bloom of her radiance and beauty."

Ralph said no more on the subject, but he looked anxious and perturbed. Isobel's words and ways had a sinister effect on his spirits.

"I did not finish my tale until we were alone, mother," he said presently. "But after I left Bainton, I rode to the house of Dr.

Abraham Burnside to learn what he knew of the matter. I found that he himself had given warning to the poor recusant, and had helped with skill and prudence to devise his safe escape from this part of the country. When I said something in praise of his liberal and broad-minded charity, the good man broke into denunciations of the persecution, and fulminated against the Government so loudly and stoutly, that I cried him mercy. Do you know the little house, mother, that Dr. Burnside built close to the sea when he was parson of Ketterside some years ago?"

"Yes—your father and I rode thither often when his wife, Joanna Burnside, lay ill with the wasting sickness, and we carried thither venison and strong broths, such as they could ill-afford at home."

"Well, the house stands at the entrance to the village, a mere stony street of fishermen's dwellings with a small grey-towered church. Some few hundred yards away lies the shingly beach. From this place, in the dead of night, the good parson launched his brother-priest on the sea. It seems that Father Johr—that the recusant is a wary and accomplished sailor, and though winds and waves were high, he sailed out his little fishing-smack with great skill, and disappeared safely on the far horizon. I tell this tale in your ear, mother, it must not go beyond us."

"Nay, I am secret," said Lady Stourton earnestly. "I am glad that the good Father hath escaped. Alas, when will these troubles cease, and all be at peace again? We live in troubled times."

Ralph sighed. He was thinking of his young wife, now bereft of the protection of her uncle; and he realised that the moment for definite action had come.

(To be continued.)



THE BROKEN ASSEGAI.

HALF dozing on the rickety couch in the bedroom of my humble South Central African home, looking sleepily down on the rough stone floor, I see the remains of a once magnificent assegai—a battered blade and broken haft. Its sole calling now is to slay bats at night and to remind me of its story. It was given to me by Wolf. That old fossil, with his pink lips, his midnight face and moonlight eyes, who leaves his lair to prowl about at night. He is frightfully ugly.

But to the tale.

Six years ago we were travelling on foot in the wildest parts of Kgatleu, low forests of trees and grass, the haunts of the kudu, wild boar and the wolf. We had halted at midday in the shade of a large tree. My two companions lay sleeping soundly, weary of the morning's march. I was lazily watching venison hung out to dry on a bough of a tree about a hundred yards off. Wolf was eating—he always was—anything that came in his way. It was a sleepy scene.

All at once two of us were roused. Wolf started, listened, and then glided stealthily to where the meat hung.

I got up and followed cautiously—he was after a Kaffir who was making for our venison. I watched him creep, and saw it was a Mokalahadi, belonging to a tribe who, too lazy to work or too shiftless, roam at large killing game and thieving.

When the two met, and Wolf was about to seize him, the man struck at his head with a huge assegai. He missed him, and the javelin merely went into the woolly tangle. With a second blow, for the fellow was strong and active, he was about to do for my poor old follower when I came up, seized a stone and cast it straight at his head.

The man caught it deftly on the point of the assegai, but such was the force of the throw that the haft broke clean off, and the blade flew several yards away, leaving him at our mercy.

Wolf then coolly proceeded to tie his thumbs behind his back, and to tether him. Next he lighted a fire—the man looking on apprehensively. Taking from his neck a nose-scraper—an iron spade of about six inches long which nearly every Mokhatla wears for ornament—he put it in the coals to heat it.

What a party we were! On the one side the two fellows sleeping quietly on, and on the other we three: I waiting to see what would happen next, the Mokalahadi growing sick with fear and hatred, Wolf watching the changes in his victim's face, enjoying the triumph, every now and again feeling tenderly all over the half-scalped part of his head.

When he deemed the nose-scraper sufficiently heated, he stepped up to the prisoner and branded him in several places, the marks being in the form of an S, to signify that *he* had conquered.

Then he brought him down on his knees, put his forehead on the ground and requested me to put my foot on the man's head. As I did not comply, he did it, murmuring low that I should be sorry for it afterwards, and then, having deprived his victim of all he had—charms, chains and bangles—he let him go.

We returned to our former occupation, without saying a word of what had happened. Wolf picked up and presented me with the broken assegai. I had forgotten about the assegai, and the occurrence speedily faded from my memory, especially as I was just then in for some stirring adventures. Once only did I speak to Wolf of the affair.

"That fellow will do you harm," I said.

"No," replied he, "I do not fear him. The law of the tribes says I am his king; he may do me no mischief. But, Morena, *you* should have put your foot on his head. He has still the power to kill you; you must take great care; I am safe."

I made light of his apprehensions, for I could not then see why he should bear me any special grudge.

Two years passed and nothing occurred, till on a night early in November we met again. It was very warm and stifling. I had thrown doors and windows wide open, so that the whole house was flooded with moonlight. I had been lying reading in bed, unable to sleep for the heat, and had just extinguished the light when I became aware of the presence of somebody in the next room. By the peculiar Kaffir scent I knew who it was.

My room was darkened with a rug, so I could slip quietly out of bed without being observed. I quickly arranged my sheet so that it looked like a man asleep, crept into a corner and waited.

After nearly an hour's waiting, during which time I could hear him change his position, even hear him breathe, he gradually glided towards my bedroom and bedside.

Somehow, he knew of the old assegai lying on the floor, and, in passing, took it up. He then stooped over and hurriedly plunged it down on the bed-clothes, aiming at the place where he expected my heart to be. Then he turned and saw he had been observed and that he was at my mercy.

As he sprang back to the door to escape, I tripped him up and secured him. Then I took a portmanteau-strap, which I had kept at hand, and tied his arms behind his back, struck a light and dressed loosely.

I took a good look at him; he was not remarkable for strength or size; his face was as ugly as were other specimens of his tribe I had met with, yet there was that something—indefinable—which all over the world marks one who is born to rule. As I contemplated

him the thought came with a rush: "I wish I could make you my friend."

I thereupon made him rise, led him out by the way he came, up by the sandy road at the back of the house to the rocky hills. Arrived there, I tied him as well as I could to a tree and left him, glad to get back and to sleep—which I did almost immediately.

How long a time passed I know not, but I woke with a start and the impression that the man was back in the house. I slipped out of bed as before, and repeated my precautions with a little more care. Strange to say nearly the same scene was enacted—the man's coming, stabbing, and being caught and bound. This time I was not to be trifled with, and saw to the thongs with great care. I led him forth and tied him to the same tree, left him and returned to bed and to sleep.

I was up next morning at daybreak, and went to find Wolf. He came along wondering what was up. From my scanty stores we took a large loaf of bread, sugar and tea, also the old assegai, and a bag of new charms which he had dropped in the scuffle. Without a word we proceeded to the place where my prisoner was tied. When we came up the two recognised each other—the man ready to fall on the ground before Wolf, and my old beauty rearing himself aloft with the air of a king. On me he turned an undisguised look of deep hatred. But he was puzzled about the bread and other things we carried.

Wolf quietly proceeded to light a fire, and to heat his nose-scraper. When I saw his intention I kicked it over, telling him to desist.

"Morena," he said, "you will be sorry for it. At least, put his head under your foot."

Instead of this I cut the man free, offered him my hand—which he refused—gave him the bread, sugar and tea, and restored to him his assegai and charms. The fellow did not know what to make of it, and after gazing long irresolutely, he dropped everything, sank on one knee, tried to kiss my hand, and then fled as if for his life.

My old follower looked me all over, as much as to say, "Surely he is mad?" gathered up everything the man had left, and started for home, pleased with his take, yet murmuring "Phosho, phosho" ("Mistake, mistake"). I wondered what would come of my experiment.

The next night something did occur, but as I had had a hard day I slept soundly, and could not think what it was. When I got out of bed there was lying on the table before me a lovely brand new "knapzak," a skin bag neatly made. I hardly knew what to make of it.

After that, every sixth or seventh day some token awaited me at rising—a carved spoon, an ivory pin, a horn snuff-box, a bit of fresh venison, a tiger-cat's skin, a wooden bowl, a few arrows or carved charms. It was always new, neatly executed, of native workmanship.

Regularly these things came to show that I was remembered, and that, as I guessed, by the Mokalahadi. Was it for good or ill?

When I was out travelling on foot or on horseback or by waggon I was specially looked after. There was always wood and water, often venison awaiting me, in such a way that I alone looking for it could find it. Often at night a large bundle of grass would drop towards me, or my corner would grow cosier than those of the others. If in travelling by waggon I was in perplexity as to the right road, somehow I was made to know it by the signs with which one soon gets familiar. Old Wolf may have noticed something; but he took care not to let me see how much he knew. At home often in the morning a large load—man's load—of wood awaited me as I left the house, or I would find my water-cans filled and my few orange-trees watered.

This went on for two years, till one day I was out camping in the wilds of Kgatleu. I was having high times. We had a couple of ladies with us to enjoy a quiet two weeks with the waggon. The usual marks of attention that had been specially frequent suddenly stopped, and I saw nothing for two whole days. As we were reclining—*dolce far niente*—in the heat of the day, lazily chatting and reading under our screen, I noticed a tiny Kaffir boy trying to attract my attention. When he saw that he had been observed, he stood up as erect as possible, holding aloft in the one hand a torque, and in the other a broken assegai, token that "something was wrong."

I made some excuse to the party and went off. The boy, when he saw me coming, started off at a run, leaving me to follow quietly. Through brake and bush we went for nearly two miles, my little guide tripping on ahead.

At length he stopped, and waited for me to come up, and there, behind a bush, he pointed me to my friend the Mokalahadi.

Poor fellow! He lay dying—had been lacerated by a wild boar, as I could see by the wounds and the tusk, fully ten inches in length, which he held fast to triumphantly.

I examined him all over and saw that it was hopeless. His young son had looked after him well, small though he was; had put water and food within reach, had made a very fair covering over his head. I did what little I could for him and signing to him that I would return went to the waggon for supplies and to explain my absence to the party, saying I had found a dying man in the "veld" and might not return till next day. They let me go my own way, as I had had medical training and was an old backwoodsman. Returning to the man's side, I dressed the wounds to give him as much relief as possible for his last hours.

There then we sat. I had grown to love the man and saw he loved me with his whole soul. He had probably paid for the wish to get me the tusks with his life, although I did not much care for such a piece of ivory. Beside us sat the boy almost too young to understand.

Towards evening the end came. With great trouble he reached out and took a small carving, an exact copy in wood of the broken assegai, and on it he pointed to a rough picture—a native putting his head under a white man's foot. Then, kissing my hand, he led me to understand that it was I who had subdued him by an act of forgiving love. Next he drew the boy to us and signified to me that I was to take him—his wife being dead. I put my hand on the boy's head—henceforth he was mine. A smile of intense satisfaction stole over his countenance, and with a look of deep love on his face he died.

The whole night long we sat beside the fire—we two mourning for one we should miss. When dawn appeared we rose and I dug a grave. After an hour's hard labour it was completed, and I could place the corpse in its final resting-place. With it we buried all his possessions—at least all he had with him—his pipe and tobacco, his bow and arrows, a bag of charms, a bowie-knife and three assegai blades. I then closed up the grave, burnt the rude shelter and returned to the waggon with the boy.

On my return home I began to take my charge in hand. He loved me from the first, was tractable and had very winning ways. I am afraid I spoilt him. At times, however, a spirit of mischief took possession of him—or was it a desire to be free again and roam as his father had done? Whatever it was, I could then do nothing with him. On one occasion, when I was from home, he destroyed everything his father had given me, except the assegai which he spared.

He gave me clearly to understand that I was not to have anything belonging to a free nation to give to the Mokgoa (whites). I only valued them for his father's sake; proofs of a blunt devotion which, however, could not go the length of living a life of settled bondage.

The little fellow did not remain long with me. *Tsamarcle* ("he went"), as the Kaffirs say. I saw that he was fretting, longing for his father's liberty. I let him know he might go, if he knew where to discover his tribe. He tried, but failed. So he gradually drooped and died. The poor little fellow had been as a bird in a cage, longing for and yet unable to use his liberty. I felt his loss keenly, had hoped to train him to future usefulness.

So all that remained was the assegai. It keeps its old place on the stone floor of my bedroom, where it lies grim and silent, continually telling its story.

W. J. N.

THE BURIED TREASURE.

BY LINDON MEADOWS.

THE STORY OF THE FIRST BURIED TREASURE, AND THE DIFFICULTIES
I ENCOUNTERED IN MY SEARCH FOR IT.



THREEdifferenttimes,at different periods of my clerical career, have I been the means of unearthing and restoring to their owners hoards of hidden treasure. "Why, Meadows," cried one of the visiting justices to me, on hearing the particulars of what I am now about to relate, "that symmetrical nose of yours must serve you as a divining rod! Where do you intend to turn up the next service of plate?" The story may sound strange, but notwithstanding that, and its being flavoured with a certain spice of romance, every word of it is strictly true.

I was preaching one Sunday morning in the gaol chapel, when I heard a slight noise to my left, and, on turning my head, saw that one of the prisoners had slipped from his seat and fallen to the ground. He was immediately raised by two of the warders, and carried out to his cell, No. 17 in A Corridor. The service over, I inquired whether the man had been taken in a fit, or what was the matter with him. He had fainted, I was told, but was better now, and wished very much to see me—a summons which I at once obeyed. I found Joel Crane—for by that name we must know him—sitting with his head resting between his hands, and he was trembling all over. He seemed greatly agitated, and for some minutes could scarcely utter a word. I told him to take his time, and drew him a little water in the tin cup that stood on the shelf. This seemed to give him strength, and he was at last able to say (he had received a fair education, and spoke very good grammar), "Chaplain, I had made up my mind last Sunday, after hearing your sermon, to confess something to you; but my heart failed me when you came into my cell the next day, and this faint that I have had now is a judgment on me for not keeping my word. If you have

time to stay, you shall know all, and it will give my conscience ease. I can't bear this state of things any longer!"

I took out my watch. "Let me see—it is now a quarter to eleven. I am sorry that I must go, but what if I come again this afternoon?"

"That will do, sir. I have a good deal to say, and shall be better able to say it then, and you to hear it."

Joel Crane was much more composed when I next entered his cell. He spoke quietly, and with an earnestness which convinced me that what he said was true. I stopped him, however, at the outset.

"As you have to take your trial, my good fellow, I would rather not be the depository of any secret connected with your case. It might lead us both into trouble—indeed, I have no right to listen to it. You have committed a burglary, I understand. Confess to me if you like, but then you must plead guilty when you are charged with it in court, as a proof of your penitence and wish to do right in future."

"I intend to plead guilty to that, sir; but what I am going to tell you has nothing whatever to do with the offence for which I am to be tried. This is quite a separate affair. Not a soul knows anything about it but myself. No evidence can be brought forward to criminate me, and the robbery could never come to light, or the plunder be restored, if I chose to keep my mouth shut. My object in confessing to you is that I may be enabled to make what reparation lies in my power for the crime I have committed. I want to give back to the owners the property I have stolen."

"That will be a very proper proceeding, and I promise to help you to do so in every way that I can. But tell me, Crane, was this robbery attended with violence to anyone? There was no life lost, no injury sustained by any of the people from whose house——"

"No, sir—nothing of the kind. Nobody saw me, nobody heard me, nobody knows anything about it from first to last."

"Go on with your story, then. What is the matter?"

"There is somebody looking in, Chaplain."

I went to the door, and putting my eye to the peep-hole, met that of one of the warders within half an inch of my own.

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Dance, but pray go away!"

"It is my duty to protect you, sir, in case——"

"There is no fear: I must have no eavesdropping; I can take good care of myself."

Dance touched his cap and left us.

"Proceed now," I said to the prisoner, "but speak as low as you can; you are trembling again; take another sip of the water."

"You see, I have been guilty of sacrilege, sir, and it frightens me when I think of it. It was church plate that I stole; I have been a very wicked fellow all my life, and though so young—hardly two-and-twenty—I should think there is not a crime that I have not committed

at one time or other. Well, I was being taken to gaol on a charge of house-breaking. I sat handcuffed in a cart between two constables—and big, burly fellows they were. It was the dead of a dark night. 'Now,' said I, 'or never!' And springing to my feet I knocked them both head-over-heels into the road, jumped out, and leaped a hedge. There was a steep embankment on the other side, and I rolled over and over and over, till I thought I should never stop. When I did, I found myself close upon a river. I plunged in, manacled as I was, swam it, and stopped on the opposite bank to listen. I heard voices and shouts, and lay still. By-and-by there was the gleam of a lantern, so I slipped back into the water and hid among the rushes, for I didn't know but what they might have a boat. There was a party of five or six men. One said: 'He must be on this side, for how could he swim with the darbies on? Keep a sharp eye about you, mates.' They searched for a long, long time, and there was a great deal of running about and swearing; then all grew quiet, and finding a big stone, I managed to knock off my handcuffs. I was a free man now, and began to breathe again—there's somebody at the door, Chaplain."

I opened it angrily. "Crouch, you are troublesome; what do you mean?—you have no right to interrupt me in this way."

"I was afraid something was wrong, sir."

"Nothing is wrong; repeat this annoyance, and I will complain to the visiting justices."

"I hope no offence, sir."

Crane resumed. "I now grew very hungry, for I had eaten nothing for a long time, and the swim over the river had sharpened my appetite amazingly. I felt a terrible craving for food, and resolved to gratify it at all hazards. I saw a light just above me, and found that it proceeded from a house. The people were all in bed, but a lamp was burning upstairs. I squeezed myself between the iron bars of what seemed to be a pantry window, and feeling about on the shelves, came upon a box of matches. I struck one and lighted a candle that stood near. There was a cold meat pie on an upper shelf. I finished it, and drew myself a jug of ale from a barrel. There was bottled porter, too, and I tried that. I felt better now, but thought, as I was in the house, I might just as well turn my good fortune to account. I lifted the latch of the door; it was fast. I saw, however, that if I got back through the window and entered on the other side the next pair of bars, it might give me access to the kitchen. I did so, and found myself in a kind of closet. I had blown out my candle, but now relighted it. There was a box with a key in. I opened it, and came upon a splendid silver flagon, as well as a goblet or two, and another affair of which I did not understand the use. I made these into a bundle, by means of a white napkin, and, putting them under his arm, walked on towards the kitchen, taking a bottle of port with me which stood in the same box. 'This is evidently a rectory or vicarage,' said I to myself; 'and that is

church wine; this, too, is church plate; and I should fancy, at a rough guess, worth about sixty or seventy pounds.' From the kitchen I went into the dining-room. A dozen forks lay on the sideboard, but I suspected that they were only washed, and let them alone. From the dining-room I went into the drawing-room, but saw no desks or other valuables. There was a piano, however, and being fond of music, I couldn't resist the temptation to sit down and play a tune or two. One was the Old Hundredth Psalm, which my sister had taught me when I was a boy; the other—

'There's someone in the house with Dinah,
There's someone in the house I know;
There's someone in the house with Dinah,
Playing on the old banjo.'—

which I had picked out myself. In shutting the piano I made a noise, and someone asked timidly from above-stairs—it was a man's voice: 'Is anybody there?' so I unbolted and unchained the front door and went quietly out. It now struck me that as there was a pretty strong chance of my being retaken, it would be a wise measure to bury the plate, which might be recovered for the melting-pot at any future day. I searched, therefore, in an outhouse for a spade, and lighted on a potato fork. With this I stole into a field, and digging a hole as well as I could, dropped in my treasure and covered it safely up. I felt easier now, and sitting down under a hedge drank the remainder of the church wine that I had with me in my shooting-jacket pocket, pitched the potato-fork into the river, and fell fast asleep. When I awoke it was getting light, so I wandered on, keeping as clear of the highways as possible the whole of that day and another, begging my bread as I went; but I was driven away from most of the houses where I asked, and being nearly starved, was obliged towards the middle of the next night to commit another robbery. I went up to a farm-house, and after reconnoitring it a bit, got through a window which had been left unfastened. I found my way into the kitchen, and secured half a loaf of bread and some cheese, most of which I ate on the spot. I then felt my way into what I supposed to be a parlour, put my hand into a sideboard drawer, from which I took three spoons; and hearing a watch ticking over the mantelpiece, appropriated that also. In doing this I knocked something down, and made a great noise. There was presently a sound of footsteps upstairs, and several voices. 'Who's there?' cried one of them; 'Tom, fetch me my gun.' 'Don't go down,' screamed another, 'for mercy's sake—they will kill you.' 'Loose him off from the top of the landing, Bill,' said a third, which was followed by a loud explosion. I caught sight of two or three figures in their nightshirts, then made off as quickly as I could. The next day I was eating some broken victuals at the door of a cottage, when I heard somebody shout, 'There's your man, Jack,' and two constables, running up, took me prisoner. I was quickly seized, handcuffed, and placed between them in a light trap;

afterwards transferred to a railway carriage ; and at last lodged here, where you find me. I would have cut the story shorter, Chaplain, but wished you to know everything that took place ; and am much obliged to you for listening so patiently."

"And now, Crane," said I, first going to the door to see that no one was within earshot, "the name of the place where this robbery was committed ?"

"I don't know the name of the place, sir."

"What !" cried I, looking at him ; "you don't know where you were when you jumped from the cart and broke into the rectory-house ?"

"No more than the babe unborn, sir. I certainly did hear the policeman say, a minute before, that we were drawing near a village, and they called it by some name, but I have no recollection at all what that was. We had come a long, long distance from the town in which they had taken me—I should think fifteen to twenty miles at least."

"What town was that ?"

Crane shook his head. "I had stolen some gold chains from a shop window, was brought before the magistrates, and sent off the same day, handcuffed, by the men that I knocked into the road."

"And you can't remember the name of that town ?"

"I believe it was somewhere in ——shire. You see, sir, I was on the tramp, and had been for many weeks, so one place was just the same to me as another."

"And you had never been in that part of the country before ?"

"Never, sir. I had wandered all the way from Bristol, after deserting my ship, which was a merchant vessel belonging to New Orleans."

"And you can give me no information whatever as to—the thing is ridiculous. A pretty simpleton I shall look, going about digging for silver flagons fifty miles from the spot where they were secreted !" And I could not help laughing at the bare idea of it. "Well, Crane, proceed ; give me all the particulars that you can."

"It is a country village : there is a pretty wide river running at the bottom of some fields that slope down from the road ; and a bridge. When you have crossed the water you go along the banks of it, then straight up about a hundred and fifty yards to the house. Not far from the house you will come upon a barn and hay-rick ; go to the other side of the hay-rick, and walk seven paces further, beginning at the corner ; then seven paces at a right angle to the left ; search there a foot or so underground, and you will find the silver cups."

I made a careful entry of these particulars, then said to Crane, looking him full in the face :

"You are not deceiving me, are you ?"

"No, as God is my judge, sir ; what I have told you is every word true ; what should I gain by deceiving one who has been kind to me ?"

"I believe you ; but someone may have turned up this plate already. You had no accomplice ?"

"None ; I would stake my life on the cups being found there."

"How long is it since all this took place?"

"About two months, I should think ; three nights before the day I was brought here. The governor will tell you how long ago that was."

"Do you not see that if I would save you, I must ask no pointed questions of him or of anyone ? The probability is, however, I fear, that this burglary having been committed the very night of your escape from the policemen, you are already suspected to be the guilty party."

"They may suspect, sir, but there is no evidence to prove. I threw away the gold chains ; the silver was not found on me ; and I was retaken at such a distance from the spot where I buried it, that I defy them to trace the robbery home to me. No one will suppose the man who stole the cups and the man who took the watch and spoons to be the same."

"I am not certain of that ; but I will do my best, as, having in this case made all the restitution you can, I wish to save you the punishment that would otherwise have been your due. But I have a difficult, an almost impossible task before me. Just think how many country villages with rivers, and bridges, and sloping meadows, and barns and hay-stacks there may be within this and the neighbouring county or two ! Nor will these help me much. I must learn who has lost church plate. That will be my first step, and it must be taken with the greatest care, because, as I am known to be a county-prison chaplain, people, if they find me much interested in the matter, may at once suspect that I know something about the hiding place of the—the——"

"The *thief* ; never mind speaking plain, sir."

"Just so ; I am very anxious not to get you into trouble."

"And I am grateful to you for your kindness, sir."

"Now good-day ; keep your own counsel"—and I locked the cell door, just as Crouch was coming quietly along the corridor with the view of gleanings a stray hint or two as to what was going on.

"A regular old gaol-bird, that, sir," said he, rubbing his chin with the bunch of keys.

"Ah, I fear this is not his first offence."

"No, nor fiftieth ; why, I should say he is pretty well acquainted with the insides of half the prisons in England ; he sports the deserter's brand, too ; perhaps you were not aware of that, sir?"

"No, I was not indeed."

"He has been telling you a pretty long story ; you must please not to believe a word of it ; the robbery has been traced direct home to him."

"What robbery?"

"Why, the breaking into those premises at W—— ; he will try to persuade you that he is innocent."

"On the contrary, Crouch, he confesses himself to be guilty."

The man appears to be really sorry. I shall have to see him often. Good-day!"

I felt relieved; the warder had heard nothing that he was not at liberty to speak.

"You seem to take a great interest in that prisoner, Mr. Chaplain," sneered Lambert, as I passed through the gaol kitchen.

"I do take an interest in him; the man seems sorry for his past life, and must be encouraged to lead a better one in future."

"Oh, I daresay! if we were to let him out this minute—it's nearly five o'clock now—he'd break into another house before twelve. I shouldn't a bit wonder if he had a finger in those two other burglaries; they were committed about the same time, though there's no absolute evidence against him."

"What other burglaries?" asked I, putting down my hat and gloves on the table, and taking a chair.

"Oh, there was one at H——; another at N——; and another somewhere else."

"Come, be more charitable; you know the old saying, 'Give a dog a bad name, &c.;' I heard of no other burglaries; I believe you dream of burglaries."

"Do you doubt me, then? I can show you the newspaper accounts of them; here" (opening a drawer), "read for yourself."

"Ah, I see; thank you; 'breaking into a dwelling house, stealing coat and pair of trousers. No. 2, carrying off a pound of pigtail tobacco and a bundle of braces'—yes—next 'a couple of railway rugs, a silver teapot, and a timepiece.' Dear me! but the wonder is that there are so few offences of the kind, considering the number of loose fellows there are about; I am fond of reading these things; have you any more?"

"Well, there's something that will suit you then—the *Police Gazette*; or would you like a copy of the *Hue and Cry*?"

"Oh, come, come, I must confine myself to this and a neighbourly county or two."

"There are only those three burglaries that I can call to mind now."

"It is a wonder to me—to say nothing of the villany of the thing—that men will put their lives, or at all events their liberties, in jeopardy for the mere sake of a little wearing apparel, or a pound of tobacco, or a pair of plated sugar-tongs; now one wouldn't think it strange if——"

"Oh, you would go in for jewellery, or a silver tea-service, I suppose? Stay, was there not—here, Waters! have you an account of that daring plate robbery that took place a short time back?"

The gatekeeper ran into his little house, and brought back a newspaper. I cast my eye down the column pointed out, and saw that it had nothing to do with the case that interested me. Mr.

Lambert and his myrmidons evidently knew nothing about that, or, if so, it had slipped their memories. I made other inquiries in a guarded way around the neighbourhood, but to no purpose. I sounded Captain Fendall, Mr. Biglow, Mr. Barham, Mr. Gulch, and other of the visiting justices, with no better result. Then I put an advertisement in two county papers—"The owner of some silver church plate, which was stolen from a certain rectory-house not long since, is requested to communicate with Y Z, at the office of this paper, who will be happy to arrange for its recovery."

I had three replies to this courteous invitation, but the descriptions of the missing articles, and the circumstances of the robberies, did not agree with those of the present case; and I heard no more. Soon afterwards, I learned that plate had been stolen from a rectory in Worcestershire, but this inquiry proved a failure also. Then I was told that a vicarage in Warwickshire had been broken into about the time specified; but on writing to the reverend gentleman who held the living, in my usual guarded way, he seemed to view the author of the communication and the perpetrator of the robbery as one and the same person; so I was fain to decline further correspondence, more particularly as I saw that his loss consisted of no church flagons at all, only of a silver salver, and a set of cruets. I next tried an advertisement in the *Times*, and failed signally again. Baffled thus at all points, I let matters drop for a time, informing Crane of my ill-success, but promising to persevere.

Three months had now passed away, when, happening to be at a large gathering of clergymen, I contrived to turn the conversation, during luncheon, on the one topic that interested me just then more than all others; and a doctor of divinity present, as he was carving a tough fowl, cried, "Ah, that was an impudent business enough. Pakenham was awakened out of his sleep by a noise below stairs, and running down in his dressing-gown and slippers, with the bedroom poker in his hand, was just in time to find that the thieves had gone—and his plate basket too. Nothing was ever heard of it, nor ever will be, I daresay; it was in the melting-pot, no doubt, by the time the police were called in." I asked for the address of this enterprising rector, and wrote to him, but received no answer. My letter was necessarily couched in rather ambiguous terms, because, before I threw myself on his generosity, I wished to see whether he had any generosity to throw myself upon. There was the chance of his saying, when I told him my secret, "No, sir; I shall prosecute." He behaved very well, however, in the end, for I attacked him again through a mutual acquaintance, and he invited me to his house. It was but an hour's drive, and I went, but was doomed to another disappointment. The silver stolen did not consist of flagons, nor cups, nor of church plate at all. I told Crane the next day, and he was sadly cut up, for we had both thought that a great success awaited us.

Time rolled on. I could hear nothing of any robbery resembling the one in which Crane had figured, and I began almost to despair of ever being able to restore the missing property. I did not tell him so, however, but cheered him with hopes of ultimate success, and he shamed me one day by saying, "I have prayed very heartily, sir, that we may find the owner, and I believe we shall before long. It is a right thing to give back what I stole, and God will certainly hear my prayer."

"But why have they removed you from your old cell?" He was now in No. 20, and he formerly occupied No. 17.

"I don't know, sir, I am sure. Crouch put me in here on Friday." Having no particular reason now for being often with the prisoner, I seldom visited him more than twice a week.

"Humph!" replied I, "it is a little odd; but this seems to be a rather nicer cell than the other; so there is no ground for complaint."

"I feel more comfortable here, sir, and the warders are kinder to me than they were."

"But the governor refuses to let you go round with me any more to exchange the books"—for hitherto Crane had carried them on a wooden tray. I had generally allowed the prisoners a choice, as there were upwards of two hundred volumes that I had managed to get together for the purpose—all full of good and useful reading, instructive as well as religious and moral.

"I am sorry to hear that, sir."

"I must obey him in this particular, of course. By-the-bye, I see Crouch very often in that next cell—No. 21—what does he do there, with the door closed?"

"I can't tell, sir; there is nobody in it."

"Listen whether you can hear me through the wall, when I go in and speak."

"No, sir," said Crane, on my rejoining him; "no one could tell what you said."

"Oh—still it is curious."

Another month, another, another, five, six, seven, eight, ten, twelve, nearly fourteen had elapsed since Crane took me into his confidence; and still I was no nearer to the solution of the mystery respecting the ownership of the buried plate than when I first commenced my secret inquiries. I had not slackened, however, in either zeal or effort. My ears were always open, and I had become an insatiate devourer of police news and intelligence, and more particularly the contents of old musty newspapers that dated about twelve or eighteen months back. So depraved, indeed, had become my tastes in this respect, that I occasionally spent hours in the offices of crusty editors, who wondered what I could possibly want looking over old files of stale papers, and always telling them that I could not find what I was in search of.

"There is Crouch again in that next cell!" muttered I to myself

one day as I left Crane and walked along the corridor; "he is now going to his dinner; let him go"—and I watched him through the gate, then, turning back and unlocking No. 21, I went in, on a visit of pure curiosity. "What brings him so often here?" Dance was not far off, but I did not mind about him seeing me, as he was no traitor.

It was in every respect the counterpart of the other cells, grating, walls, floor, fountain, table, stool, shelf, and the hanging text-roll which I had put there myself a year before. "Yes, but I put it *on the opposite side*; it formerly hung against the right wall, it is now on the left, with its back to No. 20. Let me look behind—no, nothing wrong—stop, what is this?"—and removing a piece of white-washed plaster, I found a hole, through which I could have thrust my finger, perforating the entire brickwork. I uttered a hasty exclamation of anger, but restrained myself, and placing my lips close to the aperture, asked Crane if he could hear me? "Yes, plainly;" and, going back, I examined the wall on *that* side, behind the hanging text. There was a hole there also, the mouth of which had been similarly plugged with a piece of whitened plaster; it had instantly dropped away, however, on the push of my pencil fixed to the end of my penknife blade, and now lay upon the floor beneath. Our conversation had evidently been overheard, and perhaps the secret of the buried plate was no longer in our keeping! I waited till Crouch returned, then called him in and taxed him with his trickery.

"You are a paltry, pitiful hound, and henceforward will hold no higher place in my regard than the commonest rogue and vagabond you turn the key upon. Go, you are welcome to what information you have gleaned; it will not be of any use to you, that is one comfort." He turned very pale, and said—

"I was only obeying orders, sir; I didn't bore the hole; I merely made use of it. It was the work of one of our late prisoners, to enable him to talk to the man in the next cell."

"And you removed Crane in here with the view of learning what he had to say to me so often?"

"I was only obeying orders, sir,"—and he stammered some lame excuses.

"You have acted most dishonourably," I said to Lambert, on entering the prison kitchen.

He turned quite pale also, and appeared much ashamed and confused.

"You had no right to interfere in this case; it did not concern you."

"Everything concerns me that takes place within these walls."

"Make the best of any information that you have gained by this meanness; I will hold no further conversation with you."

"That rascal has stolen a heap of silver plate and buried it. *I know the spot.* I will dig it up, and have him punished for his pains."

"Go and set to work at once, Mr. Lambert."

I felt sure that this was a mere threat and flourish, as the place of concealment had never been talked of since Crane entered the new cell; but I determined to be more careful in future. To anticipate any counter-movement on the part of Lambert, however, I made a confidant of Captain Fendall, and he promised to exercise his influence to prevent Crane from being punished, if I could manage to restore the plate. I saw now that Lambert's discovery, so far from doing the prisoner an injury, would only help me in finding out who the owner of that was; so the sooner he blazoned the matter abroad, the better. Strange to say, though (and it is a wonder to me to this hour), notwithstanding all the governor's efforts to learn who the party was that had been robbed, no one gave any sign whatever.

It was fortunate for the prisoner that his trial had taken place, and sentence been passed upon him long before the occurrence of the circumstances above related, or the governor would certainly have prejudiced the jury against him; and instead of a mere twelve or eighteen months' imprisonment, he would have had seven years in one of the penal settlements. Lambert gave me this tender little piece of information himself.

A quarrel occurred about this time between the governor and Crouch, and the latter told me that he was sorry for having behaved badly. I said, "I forgive you, then, but do nothing underhand in future. What discovery did you make in Cell No. 21?"

"That Crane had stolen church plate, and wanted you to give it back to the owner; but I heard nothing of the place where it lay buried. The governor pretends that I did—but I didn't, sir."

"I knew that; thank you."

The following week Pilate and Herod were made friends together; in other words, Lambert and Crouch shook hands, and there were, of course, fresh plots and conspiracies.

It was Sunday morning, and I was about to go up the iron staircase into the chapel; but, I could not tell why, I felt a strong inclination to visit Crane's cell first. I found him in a very excited state. "What is the matter?" I asked.

"How could you act so, sir, after all your promises?"

"Act how, my good fellow?"

"Betray me to the governor. He came last night and said you had told him all about the robbery, and he meant to be my friend, and was instructed to dig up the cups, and just wanted to compare your description of the place with my own; 'So just give me the particulars again,' he said, holding a piece of paper in his hand."

"Oh, fool! Simpleton! And were you caught in the trap?"

"No, sir; I didn't like his ugly smile, and turned sulky at once."

"It was a clever trick, Crane; but I have not deceived you in one solitary instance, nor am I capable of doing so."

"Thank God, sir! They can never find the cups without you."

"The crafty villains," pondered I; "but the outwitters shall be outwitted."

On my next visit to the cells I wrote down on a slip of paper the name of a village; described a particular field; stated a distance from a certain gate; another from a certain barn; and, drawing a little diagram, marked the spot where two lines intersected, then dropped this valuable piece of information as I passed Crouch in the corridor, returned five minutes afterwards, apparently much agitated, and asked if he had seen it.

"No." I searched and re-searched for some time, in every hole and corner of the corridor. It was not there; and then went away in what the warder viewed as very low spirits indeed.

"Chaplain, I've something to tell you," said Dance, a few days later. "I have never deceived you, and what I say is the truth. Crouch found a paper that you had dropped the other night, and he and the governor are off to-morrow evening to dig up the church plate. I overheard them planning it. They have borrowed a trap, and start from here at nine o'clock. I am sorry you lost that paper, for Crouch says it will be a feather in their caps to have stolen a march upon you."

"To-morrow evening? Are you sure, Dance?"

"Quite, sir; you will see them pass your house."

But they did not do that; they went by another road, and in less than half-an-hour I was on their heels. It was rather a long ride, but I was used to harum-scarum scampers abroad, and thought nothing of a fifteen or twenty miles gallop by moonlight. I halted at the entrance to a village on the borders of W——, and, looking over a gate, saw a party of men in a field not far off. Two appeared to be digging; a third was shovelling out earth, while a fourth, whom I easily recognised as Lambert, took an occasional spell at the spade, and then, seeming to grow weary, paused to wipe his brow. I rode nearer and reined up, under cover of a hedge, within ten yards of where they were at work. I heard them talking, and now and then one gave a laugh. I then retired unseen, and cantered back merrily homeward. I went down to talk with Waters, the gatekeeper, towards midnight. As I stood at the gate, something like a funeral-party entered. I said "Good-night, Mr. Lambert; you appear to have been out rather late." He swore a great oath, and slammed the inner prison door violently.

"I'm afraid he didn't come upon the church plate, sir," said Waters, with a knowing look from the corner of his eye.

It was one fine morning in April, and, as I passed the gatekeeper's lodge on my way to the gaol, I saw his little girl, Becky, with the new doll that I had bought her. Mrs. Waters had promised to dress it, but not having done so, the child had wrapped it up in an old newspaper, and was now giving it an airing in a wheelbarrow.

"Let me see that, Becky," said I; "I am very fond of old news-

papers"—and, indeed, the sight of one now always had an interest for me. I did not know when I might meet with something that bore upon the burglary at the rectory-house. I took off the paper from the doll, and, turning it about, came in a corner upon the startling words, "Daring robbery of church plate," and then a horrid tear left me in the dark as to nearly all the particulars. There were two lines, partly torn also, containing the words, "the gift of Mrs."—and then, "a bottle of sacrament wine—carelessness of serv—" I gave Becky sixpence, and took the newspaper home with me. It bore a date about sixteen months back, and I had no doubt was a part of the very paragraph of which I had been so long in search; but, strange to say, I could find nothing in the fragment of sheet that would inform me what paper it was, or by whom it had been published. I asked Waters; he could not tell. I showed it to numbers of people—in vain. Had there been a single tradesman's advertisement, it might have settled the matter; had there been a solitary letter to "Dear Mr. Editor," with the writer's name and address attached, I should have got some clue to what I wanted; but no, there was nothing of the kind; only some broken paragraphs of speeches, and those not local, but parliamentary. All might as well have been a blank!

I kept this provoking document on my mantelpiece for several weeks, poring over it every day, and then crammed it between the bars of the grate with the poker. But this was that deep darkness of night which always precedes morning. I was shortly to succeed, and it fell out in this way:

I was pacing up and down a country railway station in —shire. My train would be in presently. Two gentlemen—clergymen—passed me on the platform, and I heard one say:

"No, never to this hour, of either church plate or thief."

I turned hastily round and looked at the speaker. I should instantly have followed and spoken to him, but I knew that for one stranger to address another uninvited in this country, is to cause the latter to button up his pocket quickly, and see that his watch and chain are safe. I kept my eye upon him, however, and when he had parted with his friend, entered the railway carriage in which he had taken his seat, though I had intended to travel in precisely the opposite direction to the one in which he was going.

The unknown (I afterwards learned that his name was Hammond) presently opened the conversation and offered me his paper to read, which gave me, ere long, a good opportunity of saying—glancing towards him, "What, another jewel robbery! I am rather interested in burglaries. I have been trying to find the owner of some stolen plate."

"Church plate, sir, may I ask?"

"Yes, church plate."

"A recent affair? Pray pardon my curiosity."

"No ; more than a year ago."

"Silver flagon and cups, from a lonely rectory house in —— shire ?"

"Precisely ; but was your thief musically disposed ?"

"Yes, indeed"—laughing—"he treated them to a tune on the piano, and a verse of 'There's someone in the house with Dinah.'"

"The very man !" cried I.

"Bless me, this grows interesting. Why, Banks is an old friend of mine, and he will be delighted to hear from you. Pray give me your name."

We exchanged cards.

"And here is his address. Write to him, I beg ; but how came you to be in this secret ?"

"My lips must be sealed for the present ; you shall soon know all. I am sorry I have to get out here. Good-morning !"

"Good-morning. I shall be anxious to have this mystery cleared up. How glad I am that I met with you !"

By the very next post I wrote to Mr. Banks. He replied by inviting me to his house. I accepted at once, and told Crane the next day of my singular meeting with Mr. Hammond. He was in great spirits, and, after first going to the door, and begging me to see that there was no eavesdropper in the next cell, gave me new instructions as to how I was to proceed in finding the spot where the plate was secreted. The measurements agreed exactly with those he had given me on two former occasions.

I started on horseback for R—— early the next morning. By some means or other it had got wind about the place that I was going to dig up buried treasure, and I met with a proportionate amount of ridicule. "Here's luck to you, Meadows," said one. "Don't be disheartened," said another ; "if you fail in finding those cups, who knows what else you may turn up ?" "Bye-bye," laughed a third, waving his hand ; "why, this beats Aladdin hollow ! I shall watch for your return." And I saw several people laughing as I rode round the corner of the street.

It was drawing towards evening when I reached R——, after a rough cross-country ride. Mr. Banks received me at his door, and then drew me, booted and spurred, into the drawing-room, where I was introduced to his wife. A long conversation ensued, and I saw that they viewed me as a simple, good-natured, harmless sort of enthusiast, who was doomed to a severe disappointment.

"You must first pledge your word," said I, "that, plate or no plate, you will not prosecute, or make any use whatever of what I tell you."

"Very well, I do promise."

"I take your word, and will proceed at once to the field. Give me a pickaxe and shovel."

"It is too soon after your long ride, Mr. Meadows," interposed Mrs. Banks, with a sympathising smile.

"But time is precious; the search may prove a long one."

"Long, indeed!" laughed her husband. "Why, my dear sir, are you so credulous as to suppose that any sensible burglar would confide a rich secret of the kind to your keeping? Would he not rather wait until he could dig up the booty for himself? And even providing he was such a fool, how long—considering that it was secreted in the middle of a dark winter's night, without any lantern, in a country where the man had never been before—may you search before you find it?"

"*Quien sabe*; pray let me get to work."

"At once; but first come and look at the place through which the rascal squeezed himself." The bars were still bent, and a bit of iron network hung from them. Mr. Banks had left things in that state, with an eye to the punishment of the thief.

Mrs. Banks accompanied us. They led the way to a neighbouring field, and showed me a barn and a hay-rick. I examined the place attentively.

"How long has this stack been here?"

"Since the end of June."

"Ha! what became of the old one?"

"It stood yonder"—walking a little further.

"Show me the exact position of the right corner."

"Oh, come, my dear sir, I can't answer to an inch!"

"My calculations, I am sorry to say, are a little thrown out."

The rector and his wife exchanged quiet glances; he then gazed at the ground, and she over the landscape.

I was about twenty minutes in making necessary examinations, then struck in my pickaxe, and afterwards shovelled out some earth.

"Have one of my men—it will be hard work for you?"

"Not just yet, thank you."

Mr. Banks remained for a little while, then pleaded an engagement, apologised, and returned to the house with his lady, reminding me that dinner would be on the table precisely at seven o'clock. Presently his gardener and groom appeared, each carrying a spade. They rendered me what help they could, grinning horribly all the time.

I worked till it was nearly dark, then flung down my blunted pick, with something not much like a blessing on Crane for having made a fool of me. The gardener and groom went (grinning still) back to the village, and I sat down to a comfortless dinner, aware that I was not figuring in the most favourable light.

The next morning I was in the field once more, almost before day had broken.

"What," cried the rector at breakfast, "have you been at it again? Any better luck?"

"Not at present. I fear there is some mistake."

"Do not take further trouble, my dear Mr. Meadows."

"I never give a thing up. I intend to find the plate."

I worked on till nearly evening without success. The gardener had deserted me, but the groom remained true, though he had a pucker about the corner of his mouth, which I did not regard as complimentary.

"I fear I shall have to beg your hospitality for another night," I said to Mr. Banks on reappearing at dinner-time. I was not in very high spirits.

"A dozen, with the greatest pleasure; we shall be delighted with your company. You will work yourself to death."

"There are no other barns or hay-ricks, I suppose?"

"None near here, nor ever have been."

"Humph! I may meet with better fortune to-morrow."

Mrs. Banks asked if I was fond of music when we had retired to the drawing-room, and she played and sang for me.

I was up early again the next morning, and, before setting to work, I reconnoitred the country.

"Why, there *is* another barn and another hay-stack," I cried, "on yonder hill! Whose ground is that?"

"Not Mr. Banks's, sir," replied the groom, touching his hat.

"I don't care to whom it belongs. Come with me."

I was soon on the spot, gazing round with an air of triumph. I went to the further corner of the barn, measured seven paces, then seven at a right angle to the left, and cried, "The plate is there! Down with your tools! Off with your jackets"—I had pressed a labourer from the village into my service—"and to work with a will! Wait a bit; let me be quite certain. Yes, it must be there. Dig, good fellows, dig, and a crown a-piece if we succeed!"

The sods flew out, and the earth flew up as though there had been a small volcano underneath, and I soon had a hole a foot and a half deep.

"I have struck something, sir," said the groom, "and it sounds like metal."

"Gently, gently, with your pick!" And putting my hand down, I drew out the napkin by the knot. It contained a fine large silver flagon, with the cups and paten, looking all nearly as bright as when they had been first buried there. The groom and labourer gave a tremendous cheer, which was caught up in the village below.

"Run down," said I to a lad who had been hanging about, "and bring Mr. Banks here."

The rector was not long in coming, and, indeed, there was a perfect stampede of people with him. A procession was then formed, the silver flagon and cups were carried in front, and I entered the rectory with flying colours. The whole neighbourhood was astir, and I the hero of the hour.

"Pray accept my sincere apologies for my incredulity," said Mrs. Banks, shaking my hand.

"And mine," said the rector; "I am really ashamed of myself. And you bore it all with such good temper." I did not hint how their ridicule had exasperated me. "But I never thought of telling you about that other barn and hay-rick. I confess that I was a sceptic from the very first. I did not believe the plate to be there, and I fear my behaviour verged upon the rude."

"I firmly believed the plate to be there, but was in some doubt whether I should succeed in finding it. The thief, we must remember, had helped himself to the greater part of a bottle of port wine, which might make his step unsteady. Add to this the darkness of the night, and the strong probability was that he would not be able to measure seven paces in a straight line, and as many to the left, at a correct angle. I wonder more and more that he did not diverge from the true line."

"A full account of the affair shall figure in the papers. It ought to be worked up into a three-volume novel."

"Pardon me. Conceal names, and say as little about it as possible. Crane is still in gaol, and if any old charge happened, one of these days, to be raked up against him, this robbery might not tell to his advantage. Good-bye! Thank you for your help. I shall return home with a lighter heart."

* * * *

As I did not get back till evening, there were comparatively few watchers for my return. Lambert and Crouch, however, who had been ridiculing my efforts to restore the lost property to some of the gossiping shopkeepers, saw me ride up to my door and dismount, and I presently received a sarcastic message of congratulation. I said, "Spare your compliments, Crouch; I am in no mood to appreciate them." There was an instant report, therefore, that I had failed, which I bore with a very tolerable grace. The next day I told Crane that all had gone right. He had heard that all had gone wrong, and was now correspondingly pleased and grateful, particularly as in another month or two he would get his discharge. And when he left the gaol, I presented him with a small sum of money, which I had collected, in order that he might have something to keep him from starving till he could find work, and live in future like an honest man—as he did.

THE ANARCHIST.

WE were neighbours, very near neighbours, as one can be in Paris in the houses where five or six families live on the same landing, where your fellow-lodger on one side can keep you awake half the night snore he ever so lightly, and your neighbour on the other can count every page you turn of the book you are reading, through the slender partition that separates you from him.

I was a medical student in those days, and had taken those two little rooms, bedroom and study, on the fifth floor in the Boulevard Pont-Royal to be near the hospital where I was studying.

I had not been a week in the house before I had made acquaintance with all the other dwellers on that crowded fifth floor, all except one—Mademoiselle Liline, the little *ouvrière* who occupied the room next to my little study; a gentle, melancholy-looking, dark-eyed girl of eighteen, who kept aloof from us all, working quietly and silently all day long and half the night, too, very often, at that everlasting sewing, and just keeping body and soul together with the miserable wage it brought her.

Her mother had died in that same little room three months before I came there. So I learnt from the Russian at the end of the corridor, my first friend in the little colony.

My friendship with him dated from the second evening after my arrival in my new quarters. I had arranged my few goods and chattels in my two tiny rooms, and I was sitting feeling very cold and rather lonely trying to read up some cases I had seen in the hospital that morning, when I was disturbed by a low knocking at my door. I rose to open it thinking some one had probably mistaken the room, when to my surprise a man walked in; a tall, gaunt, bearded personage with long hair, wrapped in a shabby overcoat.

"I beg your pardon," he began in a low melancholy voice; "all the other lodgers are out, so I came to ask you if you could lend me a candle. My lamp has gone out and I have some work I must finish this evening. You would oblige me very much, for it is too late now to go out and buy oil."

"With pleasure," I answered, going to my little cupboard to fetch the candles.

He stood talking a minute or two after I had given him the candles, and then he seemed to notice that, though it was a very cold evening in the beginning of January, I had no fire.

"I see you have not got in any coal yet," he observed. "You must be cold. Will you allow me to offer you the use of my room to work in this evening? I have a good fire."

I was very cold, and accepting his offer with alacrity followed him down the long corridor to his room. He had a stove there burning redly, but the room was so full of tobacco-smoke that at first I could hardly make out what was really the strangest medley of order and disorder of artistic appointments and sordid discomfort I had ever seen. The room was large and bare and dirty, as only a Russian's habitation can be dirty. In one corner was a wretched bed covered with a tattered blanket; against the wall opposite the fireplace was a piano with a violin case leaning against it. The large table in the middle of the room was covered with books and papers that strewed the floor too, up to the heap of coke lying beside the stove. A few worn and threadbare garments hung on a row of pegs beside the door.

He drew the one arm-chair up to the stove for me and then seated himself in a battered old cane chair with half the seat worn away. On the chimney-piece there was a tea-pot, a large glass full of weak amber-coloured tea, a half empty tin of sardines and part of a loaf of bread, the remains of his evening meal probably. He poured out a glass of tea, which he handed to me, and then taking a tobacco-pouch out of one pocket and papers out of another he began deftly rolling a cigarette.

It was that very first evening he told me Mademoiselle Liline was my neighbour and had lost her mother three months before. They were really gentle people, but terribly reduced.

Starting on the theme of that poor, hard-worked child's ill-paid labour he launched forth into such wild theories of communism and collectivism as positively startled me. Theories for the regeneration of the world that were high and disinterested enough, but utterly unpractical and impossible. And as he talked, his sunken grey eyes seemed to glow deep in their orbits and his soft rather weak voice took fuller richer tones, swelling with his enthusiasm.

Since that night I have sat many and many a time far into the night in that most incongruous chamber of his, listening to his interminable condemnations of the injustice of the world, the cruelties of life, or almost convinced by his earnest eloquence of the possibility of an ideal society being some day realised; but I shall never forget the profound impression that first evening made upon me. I went to bed in the small hours, my ears throbbing with his burning words, my heart full of a vague unrest I had never known before.

Next morning on the stairs I met beautiful Liline, refined and ladylike in appearance, carrying up a great bundle of work she had been to fetch from her *magasin*. I had not seen her before, but knew her at once from Nicolaïvitch's description: a tall, slender, fragile girl, with dark, mysterious eyes and a head set upon a lovely throat like a flower upon its stem. I asked her, with all the respect I could have shown to a princess, to allow me to carry up the bundle that seemed so much too heavy for her slight arms. She passed me

by without a word, without a look. A few steps higher up she met Nicolaïvitch, and I heard him make the same request, which she silently granted.

I was out all day at the hospital, at my lectures in the dissecting-room. When I came in in the evening I overtook Nicolaïvitch panting and toiling upstairs with a pail of water. I would have helped him with it; but he said, with a slight flushing of his thin cheek, "It is for Mademoiselle Liline." I heard him take the pail to her door, and I heard her say in her cold, sweet tones, "Thank you, monsieur. I am sorry you should have taken the trouble."

And then she shut her door, and he came back to me, looking so pale and worn that my heart ached for him, stranger as he was. He did not talk that evening. He sat down to the piano and played such music as I have never heard before or since. The music itself I have heard often enough, some of it—Chopin and Beethoven—but never played as he played it, with all the passion and half savage, half despairing melancholy of his mysterious race.

Gradually we fell into a habit of spending all our evenings together. I was not long finding out that he very much preferred our passing them in my room, though he was always more or less absent and preoccupied on those occasions, talking little and seeming to listen for every sound in the next room.

One evening I shall never forget. We were sitting by the fire talking, when suddenly he stopped and held up his hand.

"Listen," he whispered.

I listened, and through the thin partition I distinctly heard a sound of sobbing, rising and falling in a dreary cadence. Nicolaïvitch sat for a minute or two with a face like death, then groaned and laid his head down on the table with a gesture of such despairing pain as I hope I may never see again from any man.

Then I knew what perhaps I might have guessed before: that that strange man's mighty heart had gone to lodge itself in the little bare room next door, where a tired child was crying in her loneliness for her dead mother.

After that Nicolaïvitch brought his piano and his big table covered with books into my study. We neither of us said a word about it; but the next morning I went into his room and took one end of the piano, and he the other, and we dragged it up the corridor and into my study. Then we went back and fetched the table between us, still without a word. When we had finished we gave one good grasp of each other's hands, and I went out to my work.

All through the winter we never got any nearer intimacy with Mademoiselle Liline; except that it came to be an understood thing that either Nicolaïvitch or I should take her work to and from the *magasin* for her, that we should carry up her water and do all her errands, contenting ourselves with her cold "Thank you, monsieur," spoken at the door of her room.

Sometimes we had even ventured to slip a handful of flowers or a leaf of fruit into her basket when we carried it upstairs ; but we could never tell whether she was pleased or angry. She only looked at us with her dark unfathomable eyes, and thanked us in her sweet cold tones.

There were days when I thought Nicolaïvitch would have gone mad with the hopelessness of getting any nearer to her, and, above all, of making her life any easier to her. On those days he used to play to her till it seemed to me the most passionate words must have been vague and cold compared with all his music said to her ; but she never made any sign. One day he asked her whether his music annoyed or disturbed her ; but she only answered : "No, monsieur, thank you," and went in as usual and closed her door.

Our beautiful Liline ! She was the one fair thing in our lives of toil, all through that hard winter. I do not say that I loved her as Nicolaïvitch did ; I was more content to look on her as a far-away, unapproachable saint, infinitely beautiful and precious, but no more attainable than a fixed star.

When the Easter holidays came, I made up my mind to go into the country for a fortnight, and tried to persuade Nicolaïvitch to go with me, but it was no use. So I went by myself to a lovely little country place not from Paris, and there all day I wandered about the woods in the sweet spring weather, feeling as free and as lighthearted as any man need wish to feel.

But I never heard from Nicolaïvitch—I had not expected to hear from Liline. On the seventh day his silence began to make me uneasy ; so uneasy that I should have gone up to Paris to see them both, but that francs were scarce with me in those days, and not to be lightly squandered for a passing feeling of anxiety. I wrote to Nicolaïvitch for the third time and my letter remained unanswered.

More days passed. Then I took the train to Paris.

How hot it was that evening in our crowded quarter, how dusty and stifling !

In the falling twilight I climbed the long stairs to our garret. I knocked at Nicolaïvitch's door. There was no answer. I pushed the ill-hung door open. The room was dark and empty, with a musty odour about it as of a room many days unoccupied.

Liline opened her door to my knock, her eyes red with crying, her face white and worn.

"Oh, monsieur," she said ; "oh, monsieur !" and signed to me to enter: the first time I had ever been inside that little poverty-stricken room.

"Where is Nicolaïvitch ?"

With a sob in her throat she answered me. Nicolaïvitch was in hospital with typhoid fever ; she had only that morning found out which hospital. She had missed him for three or four days, and, the concierge had told her he was gone to the hospital. He was never

one to give trouble, poor Nicolaïvitch—with that sob again in her throat—he would not stay there and let his friends nurse him. The concierge could not remember what hospital he had said he would go to; she had been round to all the hospitals, and only this morning found him at Lariboisière. He was delirious now and knew no one. And all those days he had been thinking his friends did not care enough about him to go and see him there. He would never know the truth now; he was dying.

Liline leant her face down on her hands, and the sound of her sobbing rose and fell in the dusky silence, as it had done that other evening when I first knew that Nicolaïvitch loved her.

We stood beside his bed next day and listened to his ravings of Liberty and Liline, the two great devotions of his life; and at the breaking of the next dawn he died.

* * * * *

Liline is my wife now; but in spite of all her tenderness to me, in spite of being as perfect a wife as a man could desire, I cannot but feel sometimes that half her heart is buried in that exile's grave in the cemetery of the poor.

H. BOURCHIER, M.D.

THE HAUNTED SPRING.

I DARE not listen to the lark,
 Who hangs aloft in dazzling space,
 Nor lay my lips, through dewy dark,
 Against the lilac's perfumed face;
 I dare not watch the wind-waved wheat,
 Nor see the daisies and the dew,
 Since all things fair and all things sweet
 Speak evermore of you.

I fear the gleaming swallow's flight,
 I fear the thrush's mellow song;
 The glory of the evening's light
 Has left me sad a whole night long.
 The soft-lipped ripple of the stream,
 The rose that buds beside my door,
 All breathe of that enchanted dream
 Which I may dream no more!

E. NESBIT.

